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the 1980s, the number of people in the population aged 65 and over has increased by 1.5 million (19.5%) and the number aged 75 and over by 0.8 million (20.5%).

There is a growing awareness of the need to plan for the needs of the elderly population. The Department of Health (1983) has produced a report on the needs of the elderly population in the United Kingdom. This report states that the elderly population is a heterogeneous group and that the needs of the elderly population are not homogeneous. The report also states that the needs of the elderly population are changing and that the needs of the elderly population are becoming more complex.

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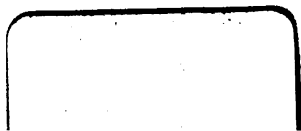
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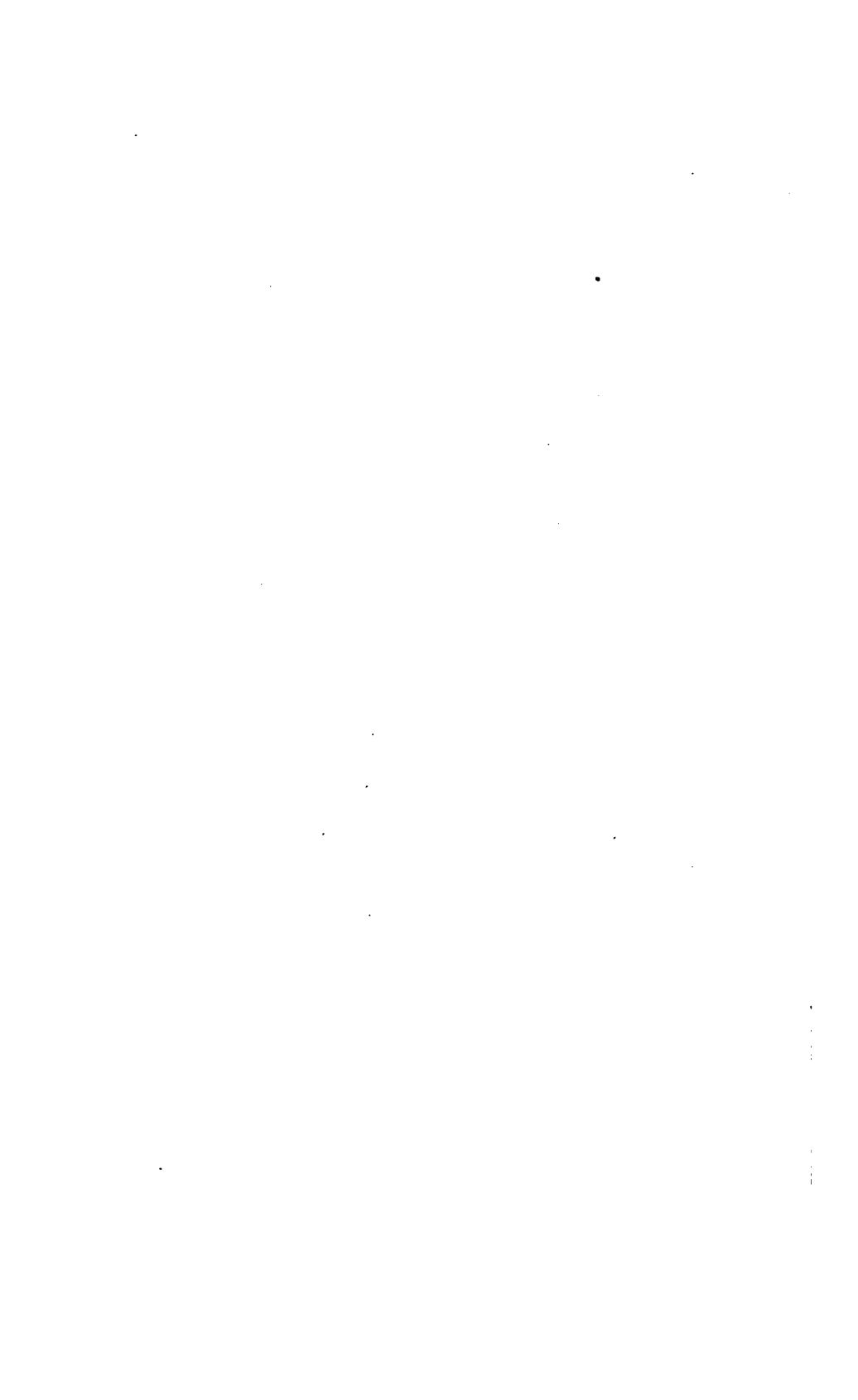
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HAMPERTON THE FINANCIER.

BY

MORLEY FARROW,

AUTHOR OF "NO EASY TASK."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.



LONDON :

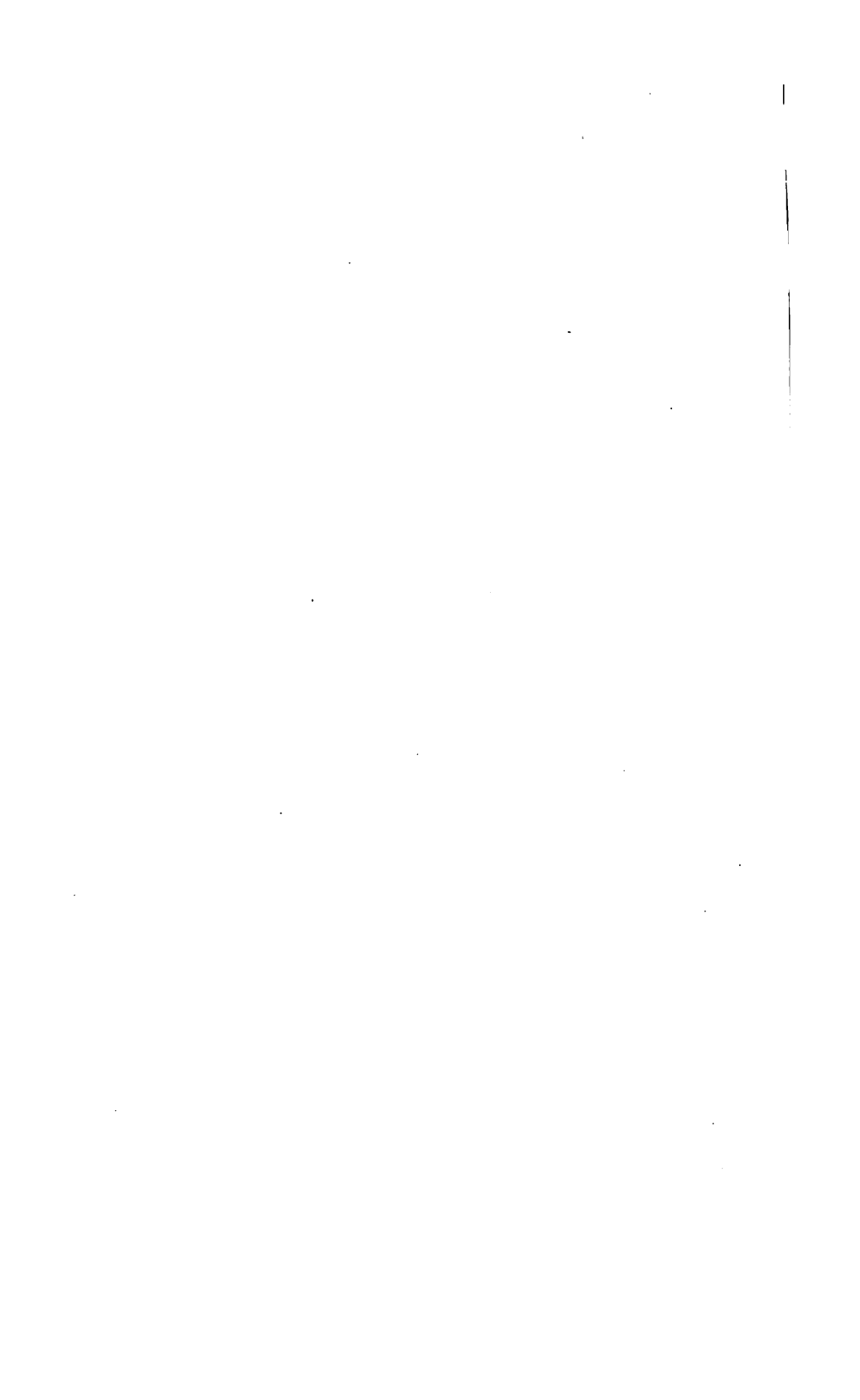
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HAMPERTON THE FINANCIER.

BOOK THE FIRST.

SIBYLLA.

CHAPTER I.

ROBERT EVERSLED'S RESOLUTION.

ON a certain bright day in May, two or three years since, a steamer running from Boulogne to Folkestone had four persons on deck, whose history, with that of others, is told in this book.

One was a very beautiful girl, sitting by herself, reading, quite unmoved by any of the prevalent disagreeable influences of a sea-voyage. She had indeed a splendid face—so more than one person on deck had said, as its dark imperial beauty fell within eye-range. The hair,

black and luxuriant, was brushed rather carelessly back from her temples. The eyes were large, lustrous, and brown ; and, if you were of a curious disposition, you would wonder how those eyes would look upon the man she loved.

Seeing such exceptional beauty and power in the face, an observer might however be disappointed in failing to discover something more ; the nature seemed passionate, generous, and intellectual, but there was an absence of some womanly attributes. Belonging to one attired in the humblest and plainest garments, the face would give their significance the lie. " If I am poor, if I am despised, if I am trampled upon, I have no right to be poor, to be despised, to be trampled upon ;" so it would speak if any unhappy circumstances threw their darkening shadow upon it. Her mouth, large and full, was faultlessly shaped. She was tall in her figure, supple in her movements, and walked, sat, or stood with a most rare grace.

" Did you see that beautiful girl as we came on board ?" said a gentleman to his friend—" a dark girl, with extraordinary eyes and hair."

"No;" responded his companion.

"Then you've missed a sight that you won't fall in with for some time. I wonder who she is!"

"You seem smitten."

"I! nonsense! I admired her artistically. She's the last kind of woman I should fall in love with. But as for you—"

"Well, as for me!"

"You would be more likely to commit yourself to such a proceeding than I. I mean with this particular lady; she reminded me of the description of a girl you once gave me; I forget her name."

"I suppose you referred to Miss Proby."

"That's the name! Proby. And you didn't care for her?"

"I, oh, no! What right have I to marry? Lester Temple, you think every one is as lucky as yourself, with no care, no responsibility—with means to gratify any whim, and no need to dread pay day! I was not born under your lucky star. I cannot marry!"

"Cannot marry!" echoed his friend.
"Why?"

“For many reasons. I am not likely to do so unless I can keep a wife as a wife ought to be kept. I have a struggle before me, which will put out of the question all matrimonial hopes for many years—if not for ever. My life will be no bed of roses. I was born in a good position, but without the means of doing justice to it; and I am bound to bring myself and my position into harmony, by retrieving the property and consequence once associated with the name of Evershed, but which has been lost by the carelessness or the vices of those who bore my name before me. This is what I have to do; and with little more than firm determination to accomplish it.”

He who spoke had firm lips, a square forehead, steady, grey eyes, a bold, ringing voice, and seemed to be the man who could do a good deal of hard work, indifferent to the sacrifice of his own personal comfort, and it may be indifferent to the sacrifices that might be entailed upon others, so long as the object, which he was bent on attaining, did not fail under his hands.

“Well, Bob,” said he who was called Lester

Temple; "I really fancied you were just the kind of man to marry; practical, common-sense-going personage that you are."

"It is just because I am practical that I don't. Women eat and drink like men; they are soft, delicate creatures, with innumerable wants; they are not unlikely to be exacting in their demands upon your attention; they have the unlucky faculty of having children, in inverse ratio to a father's powers of feeding and educating them. So no wife for me—at least for a good many years to come; and not then, unless it is worth while perpetuating the race to which I belong. If you knew our family circumstances as well as I do, you would say nothing about my marrying!"

"I know," said Lester, "that your estates are heavily mortgaged!"

"Heavily—that word is hardly strong enough. They are burthened, broken down by mortgages! We, Eversheds, have lived at Langbourne, Essex, for more than two hundred years. We are not country gentlemen, as the term is understood in its general acceptance—not country

gentlemen who represent the county in parliament, and now and then enjoy the honour of being sheriff; but country gentlemen who are occasionally magistrates, who are always looked up to in their own neighbourhood as unanswerable authorities, who for the most part farm their own land, and are, in a small way, people of consequence. We, however, have rather dropped away from this happy class of late; our family banner having, I grieve to say, licked the dust. My foolish grandfather, quite late in life, was seized with a mania for speculation, as a good many respectable people seem to be seized now, if there is any truth in the newspapers. Poor old fool! his speculations were all addled eggs. By way of consolation, he fell into another bad habit—that of deep drinking. This did not mend matters, as you may guess. The more he speculated the more he drank—the more he drank the more he speculated. He got poorer; my father inherited the weaknesses of his, and helped to make matters worse. Two brothers of his, good-natured uncles of mine, who married foolishly, got into debt, and were too cowardly

to work, helped to pull him down lower still. To pay their liabilities, he was obliged to get rid of a good deal of his landed property. By degrees most of it went, farm by farm, until only one remained—an estate which had been in our family for generations, and which was regarded as such an estate is regarded by a proud and not over wealthy country family. It was, however, heavily mortgaged. Extravagance, absurd benevolence, carelessness, idleness, deep drinking, foolish speculations ;—to such things we owe our downfall. You mustn't think we were drunkards. Free, open-handed to others, we were free, open-handed to ourselves. Indigestion was not much known in those days, and the Eversheds never had an attack to warn them against over-indulgence. They and other friends were called generous drinkers. Didn't the parson set them an example, in looking kindly on his third bottle? Why should they do differently to his Reverence, and so, as it were, fly in the face of Providence? As a little boy, I remember being taken into the dining room after dinner, when there had been a party, and I used to

wonder why all the faces of the gentlemen round the table seemed so red. I used also greatly to marvel at the wonderful kindness shown me by a certain old gentleman, who at other times was very cross and disagreeable. He would kiss me, and give me half-crowns. Wine made the poor old boy maudlin, and he enjoyed a tenderness of feeling of which he was innocent when sober. I can, even now, see my father sitting rubicund at the head of the table, smiling and nodding to me. He would pour me out a glass; that drunk, he would pour me out a second, unless my mother happened to be present to check him by giving him *such a look!* Ah! I guessed there was mischief hatching then. In time he died. I was eighteen then. His estate was left to me, subject of course to an annuity to my mother. A day or two after his burial, she called me into a little room where he used to do his business, and where in his last years (for my father was very incapable then) she used to do it for him, and better than he had ever done it even in his most prosperous days. She called me in, and told me everything, concluding

in these words :—‘ It is for you to retrieve all the Eversheds have lost ! They are not what they used to be years ago ;—the name is not what it was when I married your father. You have a clear head and a good heart. You will have to work with your brains, if not with your hands. I shall take no more of my annuity than I actually need ; the rest I shall allow you to hold in your possession, as a help to paying off the mortgages which lie on this estate. If I make this sacrifice, I shall expect you to make sacrifices too. Your life for years must be a simple one : no hunting parties, no carousals. If you are careful, and have ordinary success, a few years—twelve or fourteen—may see this estate really yours, and the name of Evershed what it once was. Before I die, I hope to see you hold up your head as high as you have a right to hold it.’ Those words impressed me ; I saw what I was expected to do ; I resolved to do it.”

Robert Evershed was silent a few moments ; then he resumed :—

“ In better days I should have gone to one of

our English universities. As matters stood, I was fain to content myself with a German one. And now, with such education as I have managed to make myself master of, with a firm will, and with a special object in view to direct that will, I am returning home to take my place in my own house, and to show my mother whether her words spoken to me five years ago have wrought any effect. She has written to me with great regularity, but she gives me no hope that my task will be an easy one. She points, however, resolutely and firmly, to the purpose, to the end in view! Now, Lester Temple, lotus-eater—*flâneur*—intellectual and artistic *dilletante*, tell me what right I have to think of marriage? (It was your mentioning marriage that set me afloat on this theme.) What right have I to doom a woman to such a life as I perforce must lead?"

"A wife might lighten your toil."

"Bah!" cried Robert, angrily. "Lighten my toil!—add to it by illness and inevitable complaining; by grudging the time which I devoted to my purpose as something that was stolen

from her—add to it, by most likely undervaluing its issue ! What a shipwreck our matrimonial scheme would soon be ! No. Whatever I do, I shall not, in the face of present circumstances, marry !”

These words were barely out of Robert Evershed's mouth, when Lester Temple touched his arm, and said :—

“There ! that's the girl I was talking about.”

Evershed glanced, started, and said—

“Strange ! It is Sibylla Proby herself !”

Another moment, and he had risen, and was speaking to the girl who had been the theme of Lester Temple's admiring words. A slight flush arose to her face as she thus suddenly met Evershed, but it was gone in a moment.

“Returning to England for good, Mr. Evershed ?”

“Yes, for good. It is nearly three years since England was anything more than a temporary home to me. And you—are you travelling alone ?”

“I believe I may say so, although a friend of

papa's, having accidentally met me as I was stepping on board, kindly volunteered to see me safely across the channel. It was good of him ; but I fancy I should be safe without his services."

"Have you been away from Langbourne long?"

"Six weeks."

"My mother—when you left, how was she?"

"She was looking rather unwell."

"I feared all was not right from the tone of her letters to me. Ah——"

And it was on his tongue to say something about the life he purposed leading when he reached home ; but the subject was not at any time a pleasant one. Surely, he might forget the stern, practical career that lay before him in the presence of a charming girl. To-morrow he would look steadily forward, dallying with no delights ! To-morrow ! the mischief would be done by that time !

"You will find Langbourne dull after Paris," said Robert.

"I expect so. I must make up my mind, though, to endure its dulness. And you, Mr.

Evershed, shall you be content to live there, away from the world?"

"I, Miss Proby? There is no choice for me in the matter; and Langbourne is my world."

Sibylla said nothing, but thought—

"This man might do something in a larger world than that of a country village. He has talent, power, education, will."

They had known each other for several years, since, indeed, Sibylla's father, having given up a fairly remunerative London business, came and resided in the place where the Eversheds had lived for generations. Their intimacy, had, however, never been very close: Mrs. Evershed was cold to the retired tradesman. When Robert first went away to a German University, two or three years since, Sibylla was in her earliest womanhood. Every visit made to his home revealed her growing beauty. He was attracted towards her; and she liked his conversation, and liked him. Returning home now for good, he saw that all the promise of her beauty was realised. Langbourne was not fruitful in young men to whom Sibylla's tastes in-

clined. Young curates, young doctors, young farmers, came sparingly within the range of her intimacy. Evershed was neither intellectually nor personally like those she knew, and she certainly accorded him especial favour.

He sat talking with her for a very long time, apparently quite forgetful of the fervour with which, but a little while since, he had spoken of his celibate intentions, and forgetful of his friend, Lester Temple, who at last walked over to his side, and was introduced to Miss Proby. He had not joined them long before a fourth came up : a handsome man, middle-aged, florid, and effusive.

"Ah, Miss Proby," he said, "I see you would have been well taken care of without my services. Please do me the honour of introducing me to your friends."

She mentioned the names of the gentlemen at her side, and of the new comer, said :—

"Mr. James Hamperton, an old friend of papa's, who has been kind enough to take charge of me."

Mr. Hamperton raised his eyebrows, at the

words "Evershed and Temple," and in a tone of marked politeness, said:—"How wonderful! how extraordinary! Circumstances brought the daughter of one of my very old friends, Arthur Proby, and myself together, at Paris, this morning; and circumstances, if I'm not mistaken, have brought together the son of another old friend of mine, one John Lester Temple, a student, five and twenty years ago at Guy's, and a relative of an acquaintance of many years standing." Turning to Evershed. "You are an Evershed of Langbourne, and cousin to a Doctor Kealwin—the acquaintance I refer to!"

"I believe I may call myself a cousin—very far removed—of Dr. Kealwin; but my intimacy with the gentleman himself is very slight."

"Ah! how delightful to have met you all so. I am getting into years; but seeing the friends of old friends, brings back some of my youthful ardour and enthusiasm."

Mr. James Hamperton was a tall and rather stout man of fifty, bald, with florid complexion, and light whiskers. Notwithstanding his fifty years and his bald head, his bright clear grey

eye, his large, powerful mouth—the eye good humoured, and the mouth good humoured, caused other small blemishes to be forgotten. Then his easy, familiar manner, both deferential and commanding,—characteristics so subtly commingled, that you failed to detect when he ceased to plead, and began to command, led his admirers amongst the fair sex to pronounce him an exceedingly fascinating man.

“You gentlemen have been making holiday on the Continent,” he said, glancing at Robert Evershed and his friend.

“Holiday!” answered Robert. “No.—At least I speak for myself. I have been studying at a German university. Mr. Temple has been affecting to do the same; his life has always been a holiday, and will, I believe, continue to be so. I don’t know what it is to have one, and it will be many years before I anticipate one.”

Mr. Hamperton looked inquisitively at him, and at Sibylla, who was evidently pained at the tone in which his words were spoken.

“You are very young to speak in such a tone,” said Hamperton. “I like work, indeed

nobody can like work better than I do; but I enjoy a holiday. At your age, Mr. Evershed, I didn't look at life quite so earnestly as you do; and though my experience of the world now numbers a good many more years than yours, I can assure you that I see no cause to consider it such a wonderfully disagreeable place, and only to be regarded as a monk regards it. Busy London solicitor as I am, by Jove, I have still the heart of a boy!" And Mr. Hamperton, smiling genially around him, and knocking the ash off his cigar, looked the personification of an amiably benevolent man.

Turning to Miss Proby—

"You will accept the hospitality of my roof to-night. Mrs. Hamperton will be delighted to make your acquaintance; and we three,—that is if Mr. Evershed purposes returning to Langbourne as soon as possible,—will leave for Essex to-morrow morning, where business happens to carry me at this time. I suppose we cannot hope to have you as one of our party, Mr. Temple?"

"No," answered Lester. "My destiny is Haystone, Hertfordshire."

Slipping his arm through that of Lester, Mr. Hamperton managed to draw him away from Evershed and Sibylla.

"Excuse me," he said in a whisper, "but I want to have a word or two with you about your friend yonder. What made him talk in that very peculiar tone—as if he and the world were not good friends?"

In answer to this question, Lester explained, as fully as he thought necessary, the reasons which led to Evershed's speaking as he did.

"At any rate," said Hamperton, slightly glancing behind him, "he appears to be enjoying himself now. Seems to have known Miss Proby a long time. Ah! she's a girl worth knowing."

"Bob never intends to marry!"

"Wheugh! never intends to marry? That's curious! But it strikes me that your friend—our friend I may call him—will change his mind when he has been a little longer in the society of Miss Proby. See! he is looking at her now as men do look at women when they are on the point of falling in love with them. Not marry?—ah!"

Following the eye of Mr. Hamperton, Lester indeed saw that his friend Robert was not regarding Sibylla Proby with that consummate indifference which might have been expected from him, on the strength of his unmatrimonial resolutions.

"My good friend," said Hamperton, "I have seen a good deal of the sex; and I know that Miss Proby is to be had for the asking by the man at her side. Ah, my cigar is out! A light, please?—thanks!"—(Puff, puff, puff—and a very scrutinizing gaze in the direction of Miss Proby and her companion.) "Without boasting, I may fairly say that it has fallen to my experience to see ladies in all their humours, running the gamut of emotion from the most tender to the most savage; and calling to mind the particulars of this experience I can come to but one conclusion respecting what is now going on before me. It is that both of them are falling in love with each other. And so, Mr. Evershed declares it to be his intention to abstain from matrimony?—*Voilà*—see!" And he emitted a long puff of smoke from his mouth—"See!

it melts!—it is gone!—so will that gentleman's intention melt and go, under the influence of Miss Proby. I know something of man; and I know a good deal of woman!"

"I don't call in question your experience," said Lester. "Still—I fancy my friend is too determined a man to surrender any purpose because a woman smiles on him rather tenderly!"

"Fudge!—Determination! Purpose! what are they before a woman? Well, well, well, you may be right. If you are, I fear there may be pain somewhere. If Mr. Evershed is determined, as you say he is, Miss Proby has the face of one accustomed to be determined too. To love and be loved by a woman of that kind would be the height of felicity! To be indifferent to her, and yet to be loved by her would be—bah! I'm talking sentiment,—the last thing to talk on a boat, running between Boulogne and Folkestone, where everybody is more or less suffering from the nastiest of the many evils which flesh is heir to. And here we are! at home at last! Blessed is the man who never carries any heavier luggage than a cigar case or a carpet-

bag. Your friend, Evershed ! see !—he is evidently going after Miss Proby's luggage. Happy girl ! to have such a *chevalier servante*."

And the little voyage was over ; and the passengers, many of them with very white faces, but with a not uncheerful look because their two hours' misery was over and the Channel crossed, were looking after their luggage, or hurrying on shore.

While Mr. Hamperton and Lester Temple were busy about the latter gentleman's luggage, they noticed that Robert Evershed was similarly busy after that of Miss Proby ; so much so that if it had not been for Mr. Hamperton, Robert, in his gallantry, would have found himself minus some very useful articles of his own upon his arrival home.

" Ah !" thought Hamperton, " forgets his own business in his eagerness to do a kindness to a young lady. That doesn't look much like indifference to the sex !"

And he whispered his surmises into the ear of Lester.

" He will not have altogether an easy life of

it for some time to come," responded Lester ;
"and he may as well enjoy himself in serving
a pretty girl for one day !"

Robert was evidently of the same mind. It was he who gallantly saw Sibylla safe from the boat to the landing-place ; it was he who led her into the refreshment room, and brought her some few trifling eatables, which have such a marvellous sustaining power for young ladies during long hours of travel ; it was he who led her to a carriage in the railway train.

Mr. Hamperton, with Lester at his side, followed these movements with his very inquisitive eye, winking at his friend occasionally, and occasionally nudging him.

"Ah ! Love, Love !" he exclaimed with mock pathos ; "what fools you make of the wisest ! Your shafts were always too piercing for my susceptible nature to escape them : and though I'm fifty, I believe I am as inflammatory as I was when I was twenty-one !"

"We had better get in," said Lester.
"Robert Evershed and Miss Proby are already seated !"

Hamperton and Lester seated themselves near one window in the compartment; Robert Evershed and Sibylla near the other. The conversation was at first general; but at last the solicitor charitably left the lady and the gentleman to their own resources—Lester did the same. Then they appeared to dose off, opening an eye occasionally as the train stopped at any station, and turning this eye in the direction of those about whom they were interested.

Thought Lester—sitting in one corner, as the train rattled towards London :—

“Bob evidently thinks the better of celibacy!”

Thought Mr. Hamperton—sitting in the other corner, opposite him :—

“A deuced passionate woman! She’s a woman who would do a mischief to the man who played with her.”

CHAPTER II.

OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE EVERSHEDES.

MR. HAMPERTON, Mr. Evershed, and Miss Proby, arrived at Langbourne the next day, Sibylla having stayed the night of her return from France at the solicitor's house.

It was given out by Mr. Hamperton that the business which brought him to Langbourne was connected with a railway now being made in that neighbourhood. The solicitor spent a few hours in the place; saw Mr. Proby, detected how matters stood with the Eversheds, and made also a pretty shrewd guess as to Sibylla's feelings with regard to Robert. He expressed his profound regret that he was unable to stay longer with these people; but was happy to be

able to state that the affairs of the railway with which he was connected would bring him into the neighbourhood again before long, when he would once more have the pleasure of seeing them. Significantly he said to himself, as he left:—"Proby is living here upon the interest of his small fortune. Evershed, I suppose, is in no position to marry that handsome girl—I must see Proby again before long, and tell him how he can become a rich man, and make things pleasant."

With a heavy heart, Robert found himself in his home once more. Langbourne Hall, standing some little way from the village that went by that name, a straggling yet picturesque place, was a square red bricked mansion, with few pretensions to architectural beauty. A hundred years ago, when the Eversheds held the vague ground lying between that occupied by the wealthy yeoman, and the country gentleman of position, this house had been built by one of the name. Here the elder branch had since lived; and with the property they had inherited, inherited a faith that this resi-

dence had no rival of its kind in the county. If Robert did not imbibe this faith with his mother's milk, he entertained no intention of beautifying it, because of the unanswerable fact that the necessary finances were not, in the present impoverished condition of the Evershed exchequer, forthcoming.

In the room where he had taken his first farewell of his mother, before leaving for the Continent, three years ago, he found her to give him his welcome home. Oh, dreary room! Oh, weary, ailing dweller there! Oh, strangely depressing welcome!

"Home, Robert! I am glad to see you. You are looking well. It is fortunate that you are!" So spoke an elderly woman, feebly rising from her chair beside the fireplace.

"Yes, mother, I am home again. Home to work, and to make this place"—looking, grimly looking, round the room—"really our own!"

There was some refreshment standing ready for him upon the table, and with a poor appetite he sat down to it. Whilst he was eating, his

mother said little. The meal over, she began to give him information as to what had been done during his absence, and the progress she had made in getting affairs into a more prosperous condition than they were left when her husband died. She had had to battle with difficulties which would have frightened many a stouter heart than her own. She had had to contend with those who, if not enemies, were but little disposed to be friendly. She had had to be niggardly in her own household: she had had to deny herself many a comfort, to say nothing of luxuries; and she had had to do this with constantly failing health. She had had to listen with headache and heartache to weary arguments of hostile solicitors. She had had to urge her slow agents to work with nerves unstrung and spirits depressed. She had pinched, and saved, and paid. All that could be done by woman she had done; and now, faint and weary, but holding on unwaveringly still, she gave the work into her son's hands for completion.

Robert listened, and promised to perform his share of the endeavour as perfectly as his mother

had performed hers. Then, with her, he looked over perplexing papers and deeds, trying to master their purport. This was followed by an inspection of the accounts ; and with a sinking heart he saw that, in spite of all his mother had done, the completion of the work was a long way off.

“Do you think you can ever set his estate free, Robert?” asked his mother.

“I think so ; at least I will try ;” was his response.

Then he left the room, and wandered over the house. How dreary the old, high-pannelled drawing-room was, with its heavy, antique furniture, the massive fire-place, the half-a-dozen portraits of certain Eversheds, who had long ago gone to a better or a worse world than this. What a ghostly footfall was his, as he walked over the once rich carpet, but which was now faded and worm-eaten. He drew up one of the blinds, and looked out musingly over the garden. A little sun came trembling in for a moment, lighting the dreary aspect of the place with life, and then as quickly went, leaving it more heart-depressing than ever.

Having drawn down the blind, he went out, and sauntered into the dining-room, where he found influences scarcely less saddening. The room looked as if nobody had been in it for years. Order was everywhere, but order of the most uncomfortable kind. Heavy chairs stood in grim array against the walls. A high ungraceful cheffonier, like a coffin standing on a bier, frowned darkly at him, from one side ; and under it were two huge vases, which to his now depressed fancy were like funereal urns. A spacious table occupied the centre of the room, solid, mournful, unused.

“ Ah ! ” thought Robert, “ how many times in the days gone by, had merry guests sat round it, and what tales of revelry it could tell if it only had a voice.”

In a moment, fancy brought up scenes with which he had been familiar in his early boyhood. There, at the head, sat his father, burly, handsome, genial ; on either side of him were men from the best families in the county. How the memory of the old laughter came back to him ! There stood the old-fashioned decanters,

holding wine of which a prince might be proud ; and all around the table, quaint glasses, curiously wrought. Candles sparkled in old-fashioned lustres, and the fire flashed merrily in the fireplace, and gleamed on the handsome, crimson curtains, closely drawn ; and on pictures where Eversheds and others figured in sporting importance. Such was the vision which Robert conjured up.

How sad, in contrast, was the reality ; the same room, the same furniture, the same strange old pictures of hunting, shooting, and fishing adventures ; but a dreary silence in the room, dust on the chairs and on the pictures, damp on the walls, a musty scent, and desolation everywhere.

Robert having inspected the drawing and dining-rooms, strolled about the airy, stone-floored hall, with its large, oak stair-case, and many green-baize doors leading into the various passages of the house. In all his wanderings, yet, he had not met a servant. Here an old woman, who had been in the service of the family for years, came flitting down stairs, and with a frightened welcome, hastily, yet kindly

given,—“ What, Master Robert ! so pleased to see you ! ”—disappeared through the green-haize doors.

When he had made his tour of inspection in the house, he sauntered into the garden. It had been an exceedingly pretty place once ; with its carefully cut lawn, its well kept paths, its trim trees, its arched arrangements of shrubs, its bowers, its old-fashioned beds, its mossy mounds, its plantation of firs, its still pond, with overhanging willows. Much of the old order and neatness was gone. The breeze stirred sorrowfully amongst the shrubs. The flowers, but indifferently tended, hung their heads as if in mourning fashion for the decaying family. There were weeds on the paths, and more than half the surface of the pond was green with a rank growth of water-grass. A boat was rotting in its shed. Ah ! those bright summer evenings of the happy, long ago, when that frail vessel had skimmed backwards and forwards on the little lake, as the willows waved with a pleasant murmur, and the blushing roses, studding the banks, made the sweet air yet more fragrant !

Wearily Robert walked along ; and at last found himself amongst the farm-buildings. There were a few men about, with whom he exchanged some words ; and their aspect was in accordance with the fortunes of the house. They seemed as weary as the mistress, as weary as the master. Robert leaned against a gate, and said :—

“ Can I ever alter this ? Can I ever free this place from its accursed mortgages ? Shall I ever be anything but a miserable, hard-working, self-denying, crippled man ? ”

He had barely given utterance to these words, before his eyes happened to fall upon the village. There was the church spire, gleaming bright in the afternoon's sun ; there was the straggling line of houses, a cottage here, a well-to-do abode there ; the pretty vicarage, standing in its small, picturesque ground, a little way from the line of the main street, the frontage of a new dissenting chapel, which, for its self-asserting importance, might have been a market place ; and, finally, a colony of new villas. Robert's eyes rested upon these new villas for some time.

On his way home this morning, he had put down a young lady at one of them ; and then, hiding the dark picture of the hard life, present and future was the bright vision of Sibylla Proby ! It did not last with him long. He glanced over the fields ; then he turned from the gate, and made his way towards the house again.

There, as he reappeared, was his mother, full of suggestion, with more mortgage deeds, and more accounts for his inspection.

It was not long before Robert threw all his energies into the work he was expected to perform. Not a week elapsed after his return from the continent ere he found himself in mid-stream. In what he had told Lester Temple he had said nothing idle. His life, if he maintained his intention of setting the Evershed property free from the incumbrances with which it was now hampered, must be a self-denying one. Any hope to keep up the old liberal expenditure in genial hospitality, and its pleasant associations, must be abandoned ; and marriage was quite out of the question.

How he worked ! Well gifted by nature,

with his natural shrewdness sharpened by education ; young in years, but with the best of experiences, the experience in which any want in breadth of observation has been supplied by keenness of vision, Robert was well prepared for his task ; and those with whom business relations brought him in contact, very soon made this discovery. It was felt by all that an Evershed very different to the Eversheds with whom men were familiar, had appeared, and that the usual family characteristics,—improvidence, carelessness of the morrow so long as the wants of the day were satisfied, a childish trustfulness in those about them,—were wanting in him. When he entered a solicitor's office and exchanged half-a-dozen words with master or clerk, it was a very general feeling amongst the young gentlemen at the desks that he was no common man. And when he appeared at his first market, millers and merchants, and buyers generally were convinced that they had no ordinary customer to deal with.

“ You will do well, Robert,” said his mother, one evening, when he gave her the history of a

very successful business negociation. "You will do well. These millers and merchants are not often accustomed to deal with one who, besides being a farmer, is a well educated gentleman, and a man of the world! Fight your way bravely, and Langbourne Hall will be yours indeed!"

Assiduously, though, as Robert Evershed devoted himself to business, he was not always brooding over the state of the markets, the prospect of the crops, long bills, lawyers' letters, mortgage deeds, and similar disagreeables. Either by accident or design, he very frequently found himself in the society of Miss Proby. He met her in the village; he saw her at church; he was in the habit of exchanging a few words, now and then, with her father.

There was a small reading-room in the village, whither Robert was wont to resort three or four mornings in the week. Here were the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Standard* and other papers; and the large world of politics, thought, and commercial enterprise, had attractions for Robert as they naturally had for the retired London tradesman. So, sometimes it came about that Mr. Proby,

after meeting Robert at the reading-room, would ask him to spend a short time at his house. Occasionally an argument, began at the puny literary hall, would carry the two to Mr. Proby's abode; and they would chat it out in the latter gentleman's dining-room. Sibylla was generally present, and would assist at the argument, to the discomfort or to the triumph of Robert Evershed. Thus these two often saw each other; and Robert in her presence forgot that he must work hard to pay off heavy mortgages, that the life led by the majority of educated English gentlemen must be forsworn by him; and that he mustn't marry.

Two or three months passed away, during which he saw a great deal of Sibylla Proby, and at last it occurred to him that it would be as well to avoid her society for the future. The same idea occurred to another, too.

"You are not looking so well to-night, mother," he said, entering the little room where they usually sat.

"Nor am I feeling so well. Age is stealing on me. Hard work has broken my spirit. I

fear that I shall never see you what I hoped to see you—free, and your own master again. Ah! Robert, my hopes fail sometimes. I do not blame you, my son. I am desponding; perhaps, though, that is the result of my complaint. The doctor called this morning; and in a moment I saw what he feared with regard to my health. Robert, I shall not be with you much longer.”

“Mother! Indeed I hope you will. You must not despond—I don’t. Things will brighten before long. I am working hard, and I hope I am not disappointing you, though as yet I have not done very much!”

“I should like to live, Robert, to see the promise of a better day coming to you, who bear the name of Evershed. I should like to see the incubus a little removed. I have worked hard to remove it, with failing health, and failing strength. I shall not live to see you master here—you will have to work without me!”

So mournfully were these words spoken—so sadly were his mother’s eyes fixed on him, that Robert sighed unconsciously; and Mrs. Evershed’s quick ear detected the sigh.

"You do not flinch at the work before you?" she said, in a quicker tone.

"No, mother—no. You know I do not."

"Still, Robert," she said, in a kind, pitying voice, "you are young to have such a lot before you. I wish it were not so. I wish to God it were not so! But as I have done my best to ease your work, I hope you will not give it up."

"I shall never give it up until it is accomplished, or until I see that it never can be."

"Yes, Robert, I know this. I am glad that I have such a son. I saw that you received (this morning) a letter from Mayley's solicitor. Was there anything of importance in it?"

"Yes, the probability of a mortgage being called in was hinted at. I have feared this for some time."

"If it is, you will be able to meet it, Robert?"

"Yes. I can lay my hands on the three thousand at once; but this will cripple me, rather. Mayley's solicitor does not expressly say that the mortgage will be called in; he only says that it is probable. He writes in a very

friendly spirit, and gives us the information on his own responsibility."

"You had better at once see how matters stand."

"I will go over to Colchester to-morrow, and see Norfolk, the solicitor. If the worst does come to the worst, it is as well that I should know it at once ; in which case, I should know better how to act."

"I think it right that you should do so."

"If this were the only mortgage, I should not care," said Robert.

"No. I wish it were. Well, they will have to be paid off one by one ; and when you have done this, you will be free. If you were a different man to what you are, Robert, you would be seeking, in a rich wife, the means to enable you to disencumber yourself."

"A rich wife !" cried the son, angrily ; "you know me too well to hope that I should ever marry a woman whose wealth was her only attraction. I have too much self-respect."

Mrs. Evershed looked intently at her son for a moment or two, and then she said—

"You are right, Robert. I should be sorry to see you wed for any base motive. When you do wed——"

"When I do wed!" her son quickly interrupted her. "Make no mention of my marriage! What I have to do must put all thoughts of marriage out of my head for a good many years to come."

Unmoved by the hasty tone of his voice, his mother said—

"Does Sibylla Proby know this?"

He started, and coloured a little.

"Does Sibylla Proby know this?" his mother asked again.

"No; I have said nothing to her to that effect."

"Then you had better do so, Robert. She called on me this morning. My eyes are quick. If I ever mentioned your name, I saw that she did not listen indifferently. You are often with her. She takes a pleasure in your society, and I know you take a pleasure in hers. Be careful! For your own sake, as well as for hers, do not give her reason to encourage hopes that

will never be satisfied. I have nothing to say against her. She is a clever, brilliant girl. But her cleverness and brilliancy will be of little service to her as a wife for you. You have said that you are in no position to marry; least of all are you in a position to marry a girl like Sibylla, who can bring her husband nothing but her good looks, and her good talents."

"Some people would not undervalue these," answered Robert, a tone of annoyance ringing in his voice.

"I do not undervalue them, Robert. You must know me too well to believe that I do." As Robert raised his eyes, he found those of his mother fixed on him more searchingly than ever.

"You have allowed yourself to like this girl," Mrs. Evershed slowly said; "and I am sure she is far from indifferent to you. Again, I say be careful!"

"I have never said anything to Miss Proby," Robert remarked irritably, "which could lead her to believe that I intended making her my wife!"

“That is very likely. But in such matters actions may go as far as words. I do not believe that marriage will be an impossibility for ever; though it may be so now! But for your sake, and for Miss Proby’s, who in my opinion is, for a good many reasons, unsuited to you, I would advise you to give her to understand, in the best and most delicate manner you can, that if she has any hopes of winning you, those hopes are vain!”

Saying this, Mrs. Evershed arose, and lighted a little candle which stood on a side table.

“I am getting very feeble,” she said, as she moved slowly from her seat. “I am sorry I have detained you talking. You will have some supper, I dare say. I am too tired to sit up any longer.” She shook hands with her son, and slowly left the room.

Until this minute, Robert had been standing. The chilly air made him seat himself by the fire, and he rang the bell. The supper which, in obedience to the summons, was brought in by a mournful old servant, he did not eat with any great gusto. He ate and thought—ate and

thought, varying the performance with a meditative poke at the fire; but his thinking occupied him far more than his supper; and when he retired to rest an hour afterwards, brooding care occupied the brow which should have looked light and happy.

He went the next day to Colchester, and made all the necessary enquiries about the mortgage. His worst fears were realised; and with a heavy heart he returned to Langbourne to inform his mother of the result of his mission.

"You, however, can pay it, Robert!" she said anxiously.

"I can pay it; but as I said, it will sadly cripple me. We must cut down some more timber. Wyndon Grove, beautiful as it is, must go, or at least be weeded. We cannot now afford to have any eye for the picturesque. Hard necessity knows no law. I should like to be master of the Langbourne Hall estate, and if it hasn't a tree upon it, I must be content. You, mother, will have no objection to the thinning of Wyndon Grove?"

"I, Robert! What objection can I have? Only a foolish pride has allowed the Grove to stand so long. If you stand in need of money, take the Grove, by all means!"

"I hardly thought to hear you speak in that tone, mother," said Robert sadly, as he left the room.

If the Eversheds had been proud of many of their possessions, they had been prouder of none than of this grove. Originally forming part of a large wood, which had been stubbed years ago, it contained some magnificent timber—oaks of splendid girth, and elms virgin from the cobbing and the pruning knife. In the centre was a spacious thoroughfare, joined to a pathway leading from the village of Langbourne to the Hall. This grove had been the scene of many a pic-nic; and on summer's Sunday evenings the Langbourners flocked here, finding great delight in walking amongst the shadows thrown about there from the gigantic oaks and elms. Perhaps the Eversheds had derived some satisfaction that, with all the hard straits they were driven to in order to pay off mortgages unexpectedly

called in, and to meet other pressing demands, they had not been compelled to put the axe to one of the trees in Wyndon Grove. But the immunity hitherto enjoyed by it was gone; and the self-congratulation, on the part of the Eversheds associated with its undisturbed beauty and completeness, was gone too.

Robert had strolled about the grove on many a summer evening, but never on a more glorious one than this. When he was a little lad he had come here at eventide to dream, as the sun's rays pierced the trees, and threw a shadow of tessellated beauty about him, happy day dreams which were never to be realized. As a boy he had come here, now dimly fearing that all was not right at home; for his father wore such a careworn face, and had long interviews, day after day, with persons, which always ended in making him more careworn, or in giving a look of wild excitement to his eyes. He had come here in his early manhood, a full conviction of the dreary truth colouring with solemn soberness his thoughts. He had seen its beauty in all seasons,—when summer warmth gave the leaves

their deepest brilliancy of green ; when autumn tinged them with its more golden brightness ; when winter, having stripped the trees bare, invested them with a fantastic beauty in which the eye would find an all satisfying delight ; and when spring was seen in the swelling buds, and the small leaves bright with a tender virgin green. But he had never walked about the grove with a heavier heart than now ; and the grove, its masses of foliage deep and dense, save where the sun shot through the commingling branches, had never looked more lovely.

Leaving the open thoroughfare where the shadows of the trees on either side were falling in fantastic figures, he walked amongst the thickest part of the timber to select trees which would answer his purpose best. He was careful in making his selection ; and when he walked back to the clearing, the shadows had fallen deeper.

There was a shadow, too, of a woman moving amongst those of the trees. A moment showed him that it was Sibylla Proby.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH ROBERT STATES THE CASE.

ROBERT advanced to meet Sibylla, and shook hands with her.

“I did not expect to meet you here,” she said; “I saw you drive out this morning, but did not know that you had returned!” Her hand was resting in his whilst she said this. She drew it rather hastily back, glancing up in Robert’s face as she did so, for the greeting on his part had not its usual warmth. Sibylla was looking very beautiful: her large dark eyes, bright and tender with the tenderness of a woman who reserves her tenderness for one; her black hair,

magnificent in its luxuriance ; her whole countenance lighted with intense emotion.

It was very true that Miss Proby did not expect to find Mr. Evershed here on this particular evening ; but she had met him here again and again on previous evenings ; and Robert had been inclined to forget some of the unpleasantness of the career lying before him, as he wandered with her here and there amidst the grove. Mindful of these wanderings, she had come here to recall some of the past pleasantness, and perhaps to dream of more.

“Are you at all curious, Miss Proby, about the reasons which brought me here to-night?”

“I don’t suppose you have come here upon any more serious business than you generally come.”

“Indeed, indeed I have. You see those trees”—and here he pointed to three or four magnificent oaks—“are they not splendid ? but they must be cut down.”

Sibylla, fixing a fearful gaze on Robert, said—
“Must it be so ?”

“It must ! I would not have touched a

single tree of the grove had I not been compelled. Alas ! you know the stern necessity."

"I can guess it."

"I am in sad, and immediate want of money. Those trees will enable me to get it. You visited this grove to see its beauty, Miss Proby. I visited it to see how I might best destroy its beauty!"

To Sibylla there was something strangely unpleasant in all this. It seemed a preface to something worse. Indeed Robert was speaking with a purpose. When he saw Sibylla, he remembered his mother's words : he remembered his own resolution. It was impossible that he could marry, or that in marrying he could surround his wife with those comforts, and with that consequence, which the wife of an Evershed would naturally expect. He knew that Sibylla regarded him with favour ; and he pleaded guilty himself to regarding her with corresponding fervour. He had been weak of late in courting her society, and in allowing her to indulge in hopes, which he was forbidden to satisfy. Such being the case, it was well that

he should let her know how matters stood with him. He could not tell her at once, that a marriage between them was out of the question; but he might drop a few hints relative to his circumstances, which would give her to understand that he was not a marrying man. If these hints were taken in the desired manner, he might go on and speak more fully. He might even give utterance to the whole truth.

He had hitherto been very unreserved with her; telling her much that concerned himself and his difficulties. There was, therefore, no need for him to be careful, when he entered into the particulars of the last unsatisfactory event which had happened to him: *to wit*, the calling in of a heavy mortgage, which, while severely crippling his resources, would compel the partial destruction of the grove in which they were now standing.

Sibylla listened with heavy heart to the details of the unpleasant story. When he had finished she heaved a deep sigh.

"I dare say you don't think I am a very happy man, Miss Proby?" said Robert.

"You have good cause not to feel very happy," she answered. "But do you not hope in time, to pay off all the mortgages which encumber your estate, and to be free from your present embarrassments?"

"In time! yes. But it will be long first. Not until I have a few, perhaps many, grey hairs in my head. It is because I believe I shall be able, if I have ordinary health and strength, to disencumber the estate entirely, and to fully establish the position which we, as a family, once enjoyed, that I do not compromise with our creditors, sell the estate, and remove to some colony, with my little remaining fortune, and set myself up there. At present my pride bears me up; and at a great sacrifice, I shall endeavour to achieve my purpose."

"I have quite made up my mind," Robert resumed, after a moment's pause, "to deny myself those pleasures, to which no rational man is indifferent. I shall indulge no ambition save the ambition of restoring the almost dilapidated fortunes of a family which was once held in high esteem. I shall take a humble place in

life, and be content with it, until, with justice, I can claim a higher. I am not a miser by nature, but I shall almost become a miser, to facilitate the object for which I live. My life will be very solitary, for I cannot afford that it should be otherwise. I must be content with my mother for a companion. I know she has my—or our best interest at heart, and that upon her counsel I can always rely. Most men at my age look forward to the formation of those ties, which, under many circumstances, are fruitful of so much good, but such ties as, regret it deeply, bitterly as I do, I am now forbidden to think of forming !”

The two were silent for some time. During the silence, Robert again and again glanced sideways at Sibylla’s face. On it was written great emotion ; and tears were standing in her eyes. He had guessed before that she cared for him—his guess was confirmed now.

“Sibylla,” he said at last. The two had been strolling on : they stopped at this word. “Sibylla.”

At the present moment, Robert felt weak.

Great at good resolutions, he was—like many other very strong minded men—not always successful in putting them into practice ; and had he not checked himself by a violent effort, he would, under the impulse of the moment, have taken her into his arms there, vowed his love, asked her to become his wife, and foresworn somewhat of that hard *rôle* in life to which he had, in a manner, pledged himself. As it was, he did check himself—and only took her hand. There was danger here too.

“ Sibylla,” he said again—“ Am I to believe that you love me ?”

“ You have known it long ago, Robert.”

“ I thought so ; and I wish——”

“ I know what you are going to say,” she answered, interrupting him. “ I have known your meaning from the first moment I came here. I am aware what I have to expect.”

“ You think I am selfish,” rejoined Robert. “ Heaven knows how deeply I appreciate your love—how I wish it were mine to take and bind round my heart ! You know what a

destiny I have before me. It is such an one as I should wish no wife of mine to share."

She was trembling at his side, and with eyes bent forward wistfully, was thinking that there was no destiny, however hard, however crooked, which she would not willingly share with him; that toil with him would not make his companionship less beloved; that trouble with him would not abate one jot of her regard; that sickness, disappointment, weariness, or any other ill which might fall to him or her, would never for a moment arouse one pang of regret that she had become his wife. She might have argued,—had she believed that argument would have had any influence over him,—that woman, in great straits, is oftentimes stronger than man. Dainty as her life may have been, ignorant of troubles but their name, satisfied as to every caprice that she had conceived—let but the hard form of Need stalk into her presence, let but trouble involve her and hers, and behold! the woman with a myriad fancies, with the affectation of pretty lisping lips, springs from her bed of down in a moment, and is

the prophetess of better days—the tongue of hope and encouragement to all drooping hearts about her—the keen eye that sees where every best effort can be made—the guiding hand that bravely steers the vessel through the storm !

“ I have been wrong,” Robert resumed, “ in seeking your society, as I have of late been doing. I have told myself so again and again ; but I have not had the courage to keep myself away from you, because—because, Sibylla, I love you as much as man can love woman !”

Sibylla started, and gave a trembling pressure to the hand which was holding hers.

“ Yes, because I love you. Do not think that I am indifferent to you, or imagine, when I say it must be all over between us as regards the future, that I shall say so indifferently, and only pity yourself for honouring me with a noble woman’s love, which I must never be allowed to rejoice in ! I shall grieve because *I* have loved you, and must love you, or try to love you no more ! I have seen this day coming for a long, long time—the day when I must tell you the bitter truth. I have cowardly shut my

eyes to it, knowing all the while that it would roll round with fatal swiftness ! It has come now. I have told you the hard truth. I love you—love you as I can love no one else ; but I cannot, I cannot ask you to become my wife !”

There was a strange mixture of joy and misery in Sibylla’s heart—joy, that Robert should so frankly own his love ; misery, that in the same breath he should declare its vanity.

“ You love me, Sibylla. Can you forgive me because my own will separates me from your heart—the heart I so much covet ?”

“ Forgive you ! yes,” she said, with a strangely vibrating voice. “ I have feared that when you did speak at all, you would speak in this fashion. It has not surprised me much.”

Then there was silence between them again. Robert had dropped her hand, and the two were standing a little apart. Sibylla’s face was turned from his, the facial muscles drawn tightly up, and the eyes fixed painfully.

Robert Evershed had said enough. He was still, however, loth to leave her. They would never speak to each other as they had

been wout to do ; and, though they would have intercourse in the future, it would be intercourse over which the memory of the present scene must have considerable influence. They might be friends when they again met—they were something more than friends now.

He had somehow become conscious, too, that the course he had taken was not altogether free from selfishness ; and he was anxious, before he quitted Sibylla's side, to have a full assurance of her having pardoned him.

They were walking slowly on, in the direction of Langbourne Hall, when Robert said—

“Give me your hand again, Sibylla, and tell me again that you forgive me.”

She held out her hand towards him. Her face was very pale and woe-worn, but beautiful and passionate still. The shadows were gathering about them thicker and thicker, and the hum of the insects in the shrubs was becoming hushed. Robert had met Sibylla again and again in this grove at this hour—the hour that Nature woos man to love—but he had never drawn her aside and kissed her, as he kissed

her now, when he said that she must love him no more, and that he must try to forget her.

She yielded to his embrace, knowing that it was his first and last. Then, with a shudder, as if she were a-cold, she moved away, saying—

“I must return. Good-bye.”

So the two parted. Robert Evershed walked slowly back to the Hall, and Sibylla Proby to the village—a heavy weight upon her heart—her mind weary and benumbed.

All the wealth of her passionate heart had been expended on this mad love of hers, and all that wealth had been expended vainly!

CHAPTER IV.

THE POWER OF GOLD.

ON the day that Sibylla Proby and Robert Evershed met in Wyndon Grove, Mr. Proby was entertaining a guest in the person of Mr. James Hamperton, who had been brought into the neighbourhood again by his business connection with the railway, and who sought out the residence of his old friend as soon as he had accomplished the purpose for which he came. His connection with the railway was not clearly defined; but when there was a hitch on a bridge, or the navvies became lazy and threatened to give up work if there was any delay in the pay-

ment of their wages, the arrival of Mr. Hamperton would soon set the bridge going again, and put fresh energy into the flagging workmen. This gentleman's movements were most uncertain. When he was not busy with railways, he was busy with other speculations. Insurance societies required branches in country towns; and it was his business to plant them, and work the local influence to good effect. Gigantic hotels reared their imposing fronts in conspicuous localities, and unless Mr. Hamperton was frequently on the ground, a sudden stop would come to the operations. Just as a handsome colonnade, or spacious staircase was on the point of completion, the workmen would throw down their tools, and silence reign in the building until the appearance of Mr. Hamperton caused money freely to circulate once more.

"What, my dear Proby!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with a nervous-looking, slightly-built, middle-aged man; "and have I really a chance of spending an hour or two with you again. By Jove! I'm glad—I'm delighted. Hard-headed man of business as I am, I can

assure you that I have enough honest, genial sentimentality remaining to experience a thrill of sincere gratification at meeting one with whom I was intimate before I became such a votary of the world as I now am. Ha! Ha! I'm pleased to see you looking so well. Egad! It does me good to see you—it does Jemmy Hamperton an immense deal of good to see you!"

Mr. Proby was unaffectedly pleased also at seeing Mr. Hamperton; but he had no power to express his pleasure in flowing words, and his voice shook a little as he bade his friend welcome.

"With the exception of our short meeting some two months since," said Mr. Proby, "it is years since we enjoyed each other's society. I dare say you see I am altered."

"Years, my dear Proby, have sown a little grey in your hair, and years have taken my hair off my head! But you are still looking well, my friend, and I most devoutly hope you will continue to do so until you have ceased to have anything to do with this world!"

"You," Mr. Proby made answer, "have not altered very much. There is the same——"

"The same vigour, *verve*, elasticity, jocundity, *bonhomie*, power, *life*—in short, eh," exclaimed Mr. Hamperton. "Ah, yes; the breath of senility has not yet fanned my cheek," added the gentleman with dramatic emphasis. "It is nearly twenty-five years since we ceased corresponding. How time flies! You were not married then; and your charming daughter, a young lady whose acquaintance I made, as you remember, on the Boulogne steamboat, was not therefore in existence to ray forth her fascination upon you. Proby, she's a fine girl—a splendid girl—a magnificent girl. You ought to be proud of her!"

"Ah, my good friend," exclaimed Hamperton after dinner with flushed face. "What different lots in life we two have had. I'm still in the battle; you are serene at home, easy, contented. But, egad, I don't think I should like to change places with you. My energetic nature would fret itself to death here. There's not much society, is there?"

"No, not a great deal!"

"How does your charming daughter like the life she leads here? It strikes me that she is made to adorn the haunts of fashion. She cannot surely find in this neighbourhood sources of amusement enough for her."

"She does not complain."

"Ah, perhaps she is contented with the quietude of the place because she may love some one who lives in it, or not far from it!"

"I do not know. I sometimes fancy," returned Mr. Proby, with his usually hesitating manner, "that she may have allowed herself to—to—in short—to love Mr. Evershed!"

"I confess that such a thing occurred to me. When I first had the pleasure of meeting her on the Folkestone boat, I observed that Mr. Evershed, who was returning to England at the same time, paid her a good deal of attention—attention which did not seem unwelcome to her. But if I am not in error, and did not misinterpret a few words dropped by a friend of Mr. Evershed, I can only come to the conclusion that the state

of the young man's circumstances will forbid his marrying!"

Mr. Proby had been looking at Mr. Hamperton with a good deal of anxiety.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I know the Eversheds are in a poor way; and I fear, though he has been a good deal of late in my daughter's society, that he has only been encouraging in her some vain hopes. I am sorry that it is so. Sibylla is all to me; and I should grieve excessively if I knew that she were made unhappy. But matters are as you say, I have no doubt of it. I can only regret it."

Mr. Hamperton did not respond at once. He looked as if he were a man who had got scent of a good text, and was ruminating how he could best expound it and improve the occasion. He collected his materials at last, and after a hitch or two on his chair, two or three sips of wine, and a wave or two of a pair of nutcrackers in his hand, he began to launch forth.

"I have no doubt, my dear fellow," he began in his wonted magniloquent manner, "that if Miss Proby were possessed of some thousands,

Mr. Evershed would willingly make her his wife. The absence of money occasions more mischief than the absence of any single good quality that a man can possess ; the love of it, we are told upon very high authority, is the root of all evil. I will not dispute this assertion, for I can well comprehend the sense underlying this expression. Nevertheless, it is impossible to do without it. Now,—wouldn't it have been a satisfaction for you to have remained in business longer than you did, and amassed a certain fortune, which, when your daughter married, you might have divided with her. Proby, you gave up business too early. You should have stuck to it longer, my friend. I can very easily understand the feeling which induced you to retire from business—a natural distaste for it, the death of your wife, and a nervousness of temperament, which may more or less have unfitted you for the worry of an active life. But you wouldn't repent it if you had got the better of these feelings, and stuck to your trade a little longer. You live in the country ; you derive immense benefit from the salubrity of the air ; your imagination

is, I have no doubt, heightened by the sublime sights,"—the pair of nut-crackers in Mr. Hamperton's hands were going vigorously now,—“which nature, in the green fields, in the meadows, in the hills and the vales, offers for your contemplation. But this is not everything! I am sure there must be moments in your existence when you wish you were something more than a spectator of life—when, in short, you crave to be an actor in the thrilling drama. I can quite believe that you derive an immense amount of satisfaction from being where fresh new laid eggs can grace each succeeding matutinal repast, and near brooks which supply your table regularly with the greenest, and most wholesome water-cresses! But life is not a new laid egg—water-cress—fresh air even—beautiful scenery! No. Proby, you gave up the real game of life too early. Had you stuck to it till now, you would have had a charmingly comfortable fortune!”

“Yes, yes, very likely,” said Mr. Proby; “I grant the justice of a good deal you say. I might have been a richer man; but I am not

covetous of riches. I am contented with a little independence, and freedom from cares !”

“ A little independence !” cried Hamperton with unmistakable scorn. “ A little independence. That is one of the delusions of the devil ! I could retire to-morrow, establish myself with a certain amount of luxury in the country. Would I ? No. Six months’ rest, and freedom from business, would do me up—kill me. I see I am gradually making you a convert to my views. I don’t wish you to launch out into business again ; but I should seriously advise you—as a man who has no right, on the strength of his years, to lie up ;—I should seriously advise you to so far actively engage yourself in the business of life, as you can, without inconvenience to yourself, by investing some of your savings in the numerous commercial enterprises which are now bidding with such great success for public favour !”

Mr. Hamperton had taken his text, expounded it by means of an effective sermon, and wound up with a telling peroration. If Mr. Proby had a certain amount of spare cash, why should not that spare cash go to support some of the many

schemes which called James Hamperton their father ; especially as a good many gave very fair promise of being directly beneficial to the immediate shareholders, as well as to those gentlemen whose clever brains set them afloat on the strange current of London commerce. *I do not think* Mr. Hamperton would have advised Mr. Proby to embark in commercial enterprises, had he not really thought that he might derive some benefit from the proceeding. *James* was not over-scrupulous in his means of raising money, when that article was in great request ; but he entertained something like a sincere regard for the gentleman at whose table he was sitting—a regard which would have prevented his doing him any intentional mischief.

The solicitor saw that his words had taken effect ; and that Mr. Proby did not seem disposed to shut his ears on the charmer.

“I have several enterprises, now on foot,” the charmer said—“enterprises which I should like to persuade you to have something to do with. If my friends have money, I’m always delighted if I can suggest any means to them

whereby their money can make money! I can assure you, Proby, I have induced many timid people, who, until the time that I brought my power to bear on them, and regenerated as it were their opinions, laid out their money—spare money that is—in the ordinary methods, getting thereby a very poor per centage (because five per cent. is a poor per centage!) to invest in certain other splendid commercial enterprises, which have in some cases doubled and trebled their income! I should like to see you a richer man than you are. You can be if you will only take my advice. Now what do you say?”

“You know, Hamperton,” said Mr. Proby, “that as far as I am concerned I should be content with a little. It would only be out of concern for my daughter, who is the sole relative I have to care for, if I embarked in speculation again. I, perhaps, you may have been aware, never was great at that sort of thing. It was a failing, on my part, I have no doubt. When in trade, I preferred, the ordinary, every-day principles of conducting it, principles which have no risk——”

“Risk, my dear sir,” interrupted Mr. Hamperton. “Risk! it is the erroneous views of most persons that any departure from the simple methods of business is attended with risks. But the principles of commerce have undergone a change. The world has become transformed; and where there was once risk, there is risk no longer! Therefore, pray disabuse your mind of the fear that enterprises, which I should wish you to have a share in, are attended with risks. Disabuse your mind of this fear, please!”

As Mr. Proby was disabusing his mind of this fear, the door opened and his daughter entered. She was looking very pale. If there had been no guest with her father, she would have kept her room, after her return from the interview with Robert Evershed. But though she was a passionate woman, she could hide a good deal of her emotion; and she tried to hide it now for Mr. Hamperton’s sake.

“I hope you have enjoyed your walk,” said Mr. Hamperton, with his noted graciousness. “It is a splendid evening!”

Miss Proby admitted that it was a splendid

evening, as she seated herself so that the light was at her back. Such a proceeding did not escape the observant eye of the gentleman with the nut-crackers.

“There’s something amiss here,” he thought.

“Mr. Hamperton and I have been talking over a very interesting subject during your absence, my love,” said Mr. Proby; “and as I like to consult you on anything I do, by which you may be affected, I will tell you what that subject was. He thinks I retired from business too early, and advises me—not to go into business again——”

“Oh, dear no,” remarked Mr. Hamperton, looking from father to daughter.

“But,” resumed Mr. Proby, “to invest some of my property in commercial enterprises, which promise to be very successful. What do you say, Sibylla? I am not greedy or ambitious of money; but for your sake, I should wish to be richer than I am! Shall I take his advice? I am sure he would not give advice, which he did not think was good, and I am equally sure that he has my interest at his heart!”

Mr. James Hamperton received this compliment with becoming modesty ; and as if to hide his blushes, he lowered his head a little, and smirked. When he raised it, he glanced towards Sibylla. What other expression there might be upon her face, there was unquestionably one indicative of her receiving the investment suggestions with favour. When Mr. Proby first began to mention speculation, Mr. Hamperton feared that Miss Proby might look upon such a thing with displeasure. He was deceived ; she clearly sympathised with his views.

“ Well, Sibylla, what do you say ? ” asked her father. “ I have only you to consult.”

“ You know, papa, that I am not much acquainted with business,” responded Sibylla, with some hesitation. “ What can I say ? You know more than I do—and Mr. Hamperton knows, perhaps, more than both of us ! ”

Receiving this compliment with a bow, Mr. Hamperton said, “ you flatter me, Miss Proby ; ” and he thought, at the same time, “ she’ll back me up. It isn’t often that women are greedy

of money ; but this girl wants it. It is possible that I may guess why."

"Fortunes are to be made quickly and honestly, in these days," commented the solicitor. "In some spheres of business, I admit that money making is a slow process ; but in other spheres, namely those created by newly developed necessities, which, in continuous stream, create other necessities, money is soon made. Perhaps there is no subject more interesting than the subject of money. It is one, which I have studied from my earliest years, (when I say from my earliest years, I mean when I was an enquiring youth of nineteen) ; and I flatter myself it is one in which I have obtained some mastery ! I do not expect to be a Rothschild, but I take some pride in being—if I may say so—a not unworthy disciple of that great man."

That Mr. Hamperton was something of a humbug, Miss Proby entertained a sincere conviction ; but she was willing to credit the fact that he knew how to make money, and to let his friends into the system of doing so too.

"Money," Mr. Hamperton went on, "is a

gigantic engine for good. I grant that it may do mischief; but, constituted as society now is, I hold that it is the great parent of civilization: and what is civilization, but the general well-being and comfort of the many! To state a truth roughly—there are two persons, A and B. A has money: B has none. A is able to live on healthy food, and to have plenty of it every day; the consequence is, he enjoys good health. B is obliged to live on inferior food, to have less of it, and the consequence to him is that he does not enjoy good health. But we'll say that A gets ill; the best of living will not obviate all the influences of inclement weather. Well! the doctors say he must go abroad, to Cannes, to Mentone, or to some health-restoring place. He is able to go; for he has the means to go with. Poor B is ill too; it is advisable that he should go to the south of France. His face falls. He can't. He has no means. He remains in this foggy island—gets worse—dies. Behold, his afflicted wife and family standing mourning round his grave! If he had only been a little richer, he would have

gone to Nice, recovered his health, and returned to his native country ! Behold, in this case, his happy wife and family, as they welcome him once more to his home and fireside ! What a pretty picture ! A, with money, can give his children a good education, and place them out with advantage in the world. Unhappy B is constrained to give his sons a common education, and to place them with less advantage in the world. What a consoling reflection it must be to A to know that his sons are doing well, and making themselves positions of importance. How very differently poor B must think. What an æsthetic influence too is money ! The man with gold can surround himself with the best specimens of the fine arts ; and drink in the glorious influence respired by canvas. Millais, Landseer, Lee, Holman Hunt, Clarkson, Stanfield, and others of equal name and fame may adorn his walls with their beautiful fancies. And who is to measure the indescribable benefit which one derives from being surrounded with the beautiful in the pictorial art ? A, gazing round upon his gloriously coloured walls, feels

better, purer, happier, more genial, more benevolent than B, who is constrained to content himself with a hideous flock paper. And now for a last illustration ! A has daughters—B has daughters as well. Possibly, in moral and mental qualification the daughters of both are alike. For the sake of argument, we will say they are alike. A's children can aspire to the hands of men of position, talent, and taste ; for in the matter of money they can meet them upon an equal footing. But the luckless daughters of B, being minus a dowry, are obliged either to remain old maids—miserable fate !—or to become the wives of men, whose position is nothing, whose talents, if they have any, are probably undeveloped, and whose taste, —for in the matter of the heart, taste has immense influence,—whose taste, I say is painfully low !”

Mr. Hamperton twanged an arrow, which hit the mark. Making allowance for a good deal of extravagance and eccentricity, Sibylla confessed to herself that the solicitor had spoken some great truths ; for she remembered what

had passed between Robert Evershed and herself that evening in the grove.

“Well, my dear,” said Mr. Proby, when Mr. James Hamperton’s glib tongue had ceased; “what have you to say now? Shall I be advised by my friend?”

“We will talk it over, papa. Mr. Hamperton does not leave to-day. But these speculations, what are they?”

So questioned, Mr. Hamperton explained the nature of a great many commercial enterprises which had just been started, and which, according to his statement, were destined to realize a splendid per-centage for all those who were wise enough to take shares in them. Mr. Proby was a simple, or, rather, unsuspicious-minded man, and when his friend dilated upon the fortunes which were to be made by gigantic hotels, by mines in neighbourhoods which, until the present day, had been ignorant of any ore, by assurance companies, by banking associations, by the thousand-and-one schemes which told such flattering tales in every daily newspaper of the time, he had no apprehension that Mr. Hamper-

ton was giving the reins now and then to his very fertile imagination.

Sibylla Proby was a very clever girl; and her last characteristic was timidity. Though she had said that she had no knowledge of business principles sufficient to advise her father upon the subject he had consulted her about, she was in no wise ignorant of those matters which only hard-headed men of business are supposed to be cognisant of. Reading discursively, but carefully, she had picked up a good many crumbs of that wisdom in which James Hamperton was such an adept. Her present attention to Mr. Hamperton did not, however, arise from a scientific love of the subject, but from an immediately selfish interest. She knew well enough that, if she were rich, Robert Evershed would not have spoken to her as he spoke some little while since. He was so situated that he could not marry a comparatively penniless girl. She loved him as only such women can love; but rather than feel that she could be of no assistance to him in the purpose he had set before himself for achievement, she could deny herself will-

ingly the bliss of his love, though without it life would be a blank indeed !

What happy consequences might not ensue if her father were richer, and the advice of Mr. Hamperton were taken !

"As my daughter says," Mr. Proby remarked, "we will talk the matter over. Shall you be able to look in to-morrow ?"

"Yes, I will do so."

"Very well ; you shall have our answer then. I shall be guided entirely by her. I have only her welfare at my heart."

Sibylla turned a little restlessly in her seat, and then she arose. When her face was once more in the light, Mr. Hamperton saw traces of emotion upon it, which he had only in part seen, as she was sitting with her back to the window.

"Shall I ring for tea, papa ?"

"Yes, Sibylla. It is time you should, I think."

As Mr. Hamperton was walking to his inn that night, he thought a good deal over what had taken place at Mr. Proby's table.

"I shall get my answer from him to-morrow.

It will be his daughter's last persuasion which turns the scale in my favour. So, if there should be any mischief—I don't think there will be—the girl mustn't blame me."

The next day Mr. James Hamperton called at Mr. Proby's. Mr. Proby, who was pacing up and down his dining-room, received him rather nervously, but said—

"I told you I should be guided by my daughter, and I shall be. I have about two thousand five hundred pounds, which I can lay my hand on conveniently. If you can place this sum out to better advantage than at present, it is for you to do so."

Sibylla was near, her dark eyes fixed intently upon Mr. Hamperton.

"If things turn out as I believe they will, that sum will be doubled in a very short time."

Such was Mr. Hamperton's modest boast.

It was a boast, but facts soon endorsed it. In a not very long time, two enterprises, which began under really good auspices, turned out so well, that those who affected to have the most faith in them were astonished. Even Mr. Ham-

perton opened his eyes wide with gratified wonder.

The morning after the day when the shares in the two concerns had been at a premium, Mr. Proby received a letter from his gold-making friend, running thus :—

“You have done grandly in both affairs ; better, even, than I thought you would. Sell out now—you can’t do better. I have another splendid thing on the cards that I should like you to invest largely in. If you do, you’ll reap a glorious harvest. Any more spare cash that you can lay hands on might with advantage go to the same concern. Don’t flinch. With luck such as you’ve had, you ought to stand at nothing.

“J. H.”

Mr. Proby replied :—

“I am much obliged to you for your kindness. Sibylla wishes me to say the same. I have consulted her upon the other investment, and her advice is to go on.”

Letters were constantly passing between Mr. Proby and Mr. Hamperton ; and it would appear that a good deal of the former gentleman’s

spare cash was transferred to the hands of the solicitor. At last it came to pass that the greater part of Mr. Proby's property was withdrawn from where it had been first placed, yielding there a healthy four or five per-cent., and distributed amongst the enterprises of which Mr. James Hamperton was an able representative.

"Dear me—dear me! Sibylla," said Mr. Proby to his daughter, one morning, after reading a letter which had come by that day's post, in Mr. Hamperton's handwriting; "if things go on thus, I shall really be a rich man. Hamperton is a wonderful person—a wonderful person! He writes to tell me that the last thing I took shares in is doing marvels, and that I had better sell. Buy and sell! Buy and sell!"

Sibylla Proby did not think much about Mr. Hamperton. She was thinking of Robert Evershed.

Would he refuse her hand if it were offered him, holding thousands?

CHAPTER V.

GIRL AND WOMAN.

LESTER TEMPLE, college friend of Robert Evershed, was destined, upon his return home, to find that his future life promised in no wise to resemble that which his imagination had pictured as the Boulogne steamer cut its way through the bright waters. As Evershed spoke of the career before himself, and of the sacrifices it would entail, Temple dreamed pleasant dreams of the existence which seemed to lie before himself.

As the son of a country doctor, who had made large sums of money by his profession,

and who from time to time had found occasion to rejoice over agreeable legacies from uncles and aunts, and other relatives, Lester Temple had indulged in sanguine hopes that he would at any rate be exempted from the cares of working for a living. His tastes were artistical and musical,—more the latter, perhaps, than the former; and ever since he was a boy, and knew that he could take life as his inclination willed, he delighted in the hope of becoming great by the exercise of his talents in certainly one of the most beautiful, if not the most profitable, professions. He had studied at the Conservatorium at Leipsic; he had taken lessons in musical composition of some of the best German masters. He was clever, bright, fanciful, and so, as he thought he had plenty of money, which would afford him plenty of leisure, why should he not give his inclination full sway; and why should he, more particularly when comparing his fortunes with those of the unlucky Evershed, think himself other than the happiest and most lucky of men?

When he arrived in Haystone, Hertfordshire,

where his father had resided for years, he found his mother and a young lady, her companion, dressed in deep mourning, who met him with sad tearful faces and words, as he gazed with anxious suspicion at them.

"Oh, Lester! your poor father is dead! He has been dead more than three weeks!"

"And you have written to me?" said Lester.

"Yes; I have written again and again—Blanche too. You were travelling."

"I have been wandering from place to place during the last fortnight. As I knew you were aware that I was about to return home, I did not think it necessary to call at the *poste restante* in Paris, where I dare say I should have found your letters."

There was a silence for a while, and then his mother said—

"But you do not know the worst yet. Oh, Lester! I wish, after your long absence, that we could have given you a brighter welcome. Tell him the story, Blanche, I cannot."

She who was called Blanche was about eighteen years old, in figure very slight,

and with a complexion of almost alabaster whiteness; her eyes were large, dark, and tender; and her hair, most beautifully soft and luxuriant, though worn close to the head, made the countenance a singularly impressive one.

“Can you bear trouble, Lester,” she said, “even more than that which is caused by your good and most kind father’s death? He died poor, Lester—very poor. The independence he had hoped to save for you is gone. All that he left will be but barely sufficient to keep your mother.”

“But how—how did this happen?”

“His practice has been falling off for some time, and some houses which he bought in London were burnt before he insured them. He speculated, too, and lost a great deal. But you shall see his papers, and then you will know all.”

Blanche left the room, returning immediately with a packet of papers, which she placed on the table before Lester.

He looked through them; it did not require

a long examination to show that Blanche's story was correct. He soon mastered their purport, and saw that she had softened down a great deal of the real hardness of the case.

He gave a sigh.

"I shall have to turn out. As for you mother, and you, Blanche—you will remain here."

"No," said the young girl, timidly, but peremptorily, "I shall not; I have no claim on you; I shall go out as a governess; I can earn my own living."

"Blanche," said Mrs. Temple, "you will not leave me?"

"No, no, Blanche will not leave you, mother," said Lester; "I insist on that. I tell you, that this home is yours as long as you need it: I insist on your remaining here. It would grieve my mother bitterly for you to go away; you will be her only comfort, little woman. Ah! I used to call you Petite at one time; now——"

"Call me Petite, too, now. I am not grown so very much, am I?"

"Yes, prettier than ever, Petite."

As she heard these words she turned her face towards the window, and the flush which came upon it had hardly died off, when she turned it towards Lester again, as he was glancing through his father's papers a second time.

"Your poor father, Lester, on his dying bed," said Mrs. Temple, "begged you to forgive him. He felt that he had wronged you."

"Wronged me!" cried Lester, hastily; "never—never—never! To me he was the kindest of fathers. I am young, and I can, I dare say, if I try, do something; at any rate, I will try."

"You bear your misfortune bravely."

"What is the good of murmuring, mother? If I know that you and Blanche are living in comfort and ease, I shall be contented. One day, perhaps, I may set the Thames on fire, and we may be prosperous again."

"At any rate, Lester," said Mrs. Temple, "your misfortune has brought you a friend already,—a friend who, out of regard to your

father (they were fellow-students at Guy's together), thinks he can obtain for you a situation of comfort and independence."

"Indeed! who is this friend?"

"Dr. Kealwin."

"Dr. Kealwin? Truly, I have heard that name somewhere. Ah! I remember; it was yesterday in the boat. And so Dr. Kealwin is going to be my patron? He is a relative—a rich relative—of an old college chum of mine, Robert Evershed. And what is this situation of comfort and independence?"

"He did not tell me. But he is going to call to-day, and then we shall know."

Towards the close of the day, when the afternoon was melting into evening, and these three people were sitting together and talking over the sad event which had cast its shadow over their household and of the future life of Lester, a rap was heard at the front door, which was followed by the arrival of a gentleman, who walked in, smiling and greeting them pleasantly.

The Doctor was friendly and confidential with Lester before he had been in his company three

minutes ; so genial, so kindly a man Temple never remembered having met.

"I won't keep you waiting long," he said, "before I tell you what has brought me here. It is good news for you, and I am sure good news for your excellent mother. A friend of mine is willing to take you as tutor, with a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. You will have very little to do, and you will live in a charming family. Will you accept the offer?"

"Certainly. If——"

"Don't trouble yourself with 'ifs.' I should not have got the son of my old friend a situation that was not unexceptionable. You might hunt England, and not find such an opening as this. You'll avail yourself of it?"

"Unhesitatingly!"

"Good. It's in the house of a gentleman who lives in the same village that I do—a Mr. Bryant. He is very rich, and has three daughters and one son—a fine fellow of thirteen. The son will be your charge—not a heavy one, I fancy. When you've discharged your few hours'

duties with him, you can flirt with the daughters—at least with two of 'em—the third is some years younger than her brother!" (At this mention of Lester's flirting, he laughed good-humouredly; Mrs. Temple smiled, and thought, with some very pardonable pride, that such a handsome man as her son might flirt with any lady: but Blanche Legh looked alarmed—the little colour dying out of her face, which she turned suddenly away from the loquacious doctor, as he spoke in this fashion.) "You will be treated as one of the family—as a gentleman. You will have plenty of leisure to read up for any profession you wish to follow. If it is any gratification to you to know so much, you must know that you will see me nearly every day; and if you have anything to complain of, which I don't think you will, my ears will be open to your grievance. Well, what do you think of your fortune?"

"That it is a very good one, and that I ought to be much obliged to you for obtaining it for me."

As Lester was listening to the programme of

Dr. Kealwin, he took an inventory of the kindly-speaking doctor's facial characteristics.

George Dampier Kealwin was a very pleasant-looking gentleman, some five and fifty years of age. The thick, silky brown hair, which he wore rather short, was streaked here and there with gray ; but the light brown eyes glowed as brightly and as healthily as they had glowed when he was a lad of eighteen. There was scarcely a wrinkle in the face, and the cheeks were as round and symmetrical as those of a ruddy-faced school-boy. His hands, the right one of which he used rather frequently, to give point to what he was saying, were very white and plump. He was not tall, but was exceedingly well built ; and age had neither brought him an unpicturesque stoutness, nor made his frame gaunt or thin. He preserved the exquisite proportions of a well-built young man of five and twenty. In making his observations, Lester was, however, more struck by the marvellously healthy look of the doctor. He seemed a man who had never been ill—he seemed a man who never could be ill ;

and as to his ever having busied himself in his profession, which, more than any profession, brings a weary, sick look to the face, and takes elasticity from the movements,—such an idea was out of the question.

“I have heard of you before to-day,” remarked Lester. “On the boat yesterday, as I was returning from France, a college friend of mine—Robert Evershed—was spoken of as being a connexion of yours.”

“Robert Evershed—he is a distant connexion of mine,” said the Doctor, carelessly; “a very distant one, though. And who was it that spoke of me to you?”

“A Mr. Hamperton,”

“Hamperton! Do you know him? That man seems to be known to everybody, and he again knows everybody,—a wonderful man, in various ways. Did Mr. Evershed seem intimate with him?”

“He met him then, as I did, for the first time.”

“Oh! you may depend upon it that Hamperton won’t cultivate his intimacy long, unless

he can get something out of him," laughed Kealwin. "With Hamperton's extensive acquaintance, I never knew him fail to turn every one of them to his use, except——ha! ha!——myself!"

Lester looked quickly at the Doctor as he made this remark, which was so spoken as to give an impression that, easy-going, genial, guileless man as he was, to all outward appearance, there was something behind it all, which only a long intimacy with him could reveal.

"Do you call in question Mr. Hamperton's honour?"

"Honour! Oh, dear me! he is a shrewd, urbane man of the world; and when I have ever wanted any legal business done, he has done it well. I, personally, haven't a word to say against him. And now"—rising—"I believe I have discharged my duty. If your son writes you word that he is unhappy at Messingham Priory, my name is not Kealwin, and I have made the greatest mistake yet in judging the qualities of a family. And now, young lady," addressing Blanche; "are you satisfied

with the fate in store for your—I suppose I must say—adopted brother?”

“If he is happy, I shall be happy.”

“Ah! that’s well.” Then, pausing a moment, and with his eyes fixed very curiously upon Blanche, he said to Mrs. Temple—“I forget what relation this young lady is of yours, but I conjecture she is some.”

“She is none.”

“Nor of your husband’s?”

“No; nor of his. We have adopted her—that is all.”

“I see,” answered Kealwin, bowing.

He perceived that she did not wish to speak more fully on the subject, and forbore to press it.

More persons than Dr. Kealwin had been curious about the parentage of her who was called Blanche Legh; and all who had hitherto attempted to press their curiosity either upon Mrs. Temple, or her husband, had met with non-success. Mr. Temple had adopted her when she was quite a child, and adopted her with the full sanction of his wife: thus silencing any scandal which might have arisen. Nobody at

Haystone knew anything of the family from whence Blanche came, or of the neighbourhood where she was born. Thus much was known—that Mr. and Mrs. Temple went one autumn for a tour—some said to Scotland, some to the lakes, and some to France (the view of the majority being in favour of the latter country), and that they returned with a child, who was evidently not their own, but who was thenceforth treated as a daughter.

“I am glad to have been able to do the son of my old friend a service. When I return to Mes-singham, Lester will be my companion,” said Kealwin, as he went away, accompanied by Mrs. Temple, who was anxious to know more of the persons with whom her son was going to live, and stood talking with him some while at the garden gate. In the meantime Lester Temple and Blanche Legh were left together for the first time since his return.

“Dear little girl,” he said; “this seems all so strange, so unexpected. But for me to return and find you looking such a woman, is scarcely less so. My little sister!”

The girl so spoken to blushed, and said very quietly, "I dare say not, Lester. We alter a great deal in a year."

"Yes ; yet, in some respects, it would be impossible for you to alter—you were always so good and sweet. How I wish you were indeed my sister !"

The girl had moved to a little piano which stood in the room, and her fingers were straying over the keys. At these words there was a tremor in the chords she struck, which Lester's quick ear detected, but whose significance he misinterpreted.

"Don't grieve, little one, that I am obliged to turn out. I don't despair. Oh, my kind sister, why should you trouble yourself about me,—your healthy, and by no means low-spirited brother? Ah!"—her hands were still trembling over the keys ; "you are fancying all kinds of dreadful things. You picture the poor tutor being spurned by those two beautiful women, of whom Doctor Kealwin spoke, and then breaking his heart in consequence. Don't fear. The poor tutor will be tolerably able to

hold his own with these grand folks, and won't waste his heart on those who are not likely to give him one in return."

Blanche had moved from the piano, during these words, and was standing by the window overlooking the garden, where the Doctor and Mrs. Temple were pacing in friendly talk. The May evening was sweetly calm and bright. There was a golden hue in the sky from the setting sun, and its slanting rays fell on the head of the young girl, as she stood gazing out. Fragrant scents from the flowers rose up from the garden: then pleasantly borne on the quiet air was the sound of the village church clock striking seven.

"Petite," he said. "No, I mustn't call you Petite now. You are a woman!"

"But I like to be called Petite best."

"Then henceforth I'll always call you so. I was thinking of you as I remember you years ago! Let me see. First of all, I can remember a very little girl, to whom my bat and balls, and whip, and rocking horse, and infantine cannon (a deadly instrument I was never permitted to

load lest my small person should be blown to pieces by a half a grain of gunpowder), were articles of immense interest to you! I remember, too—but this must be some time afterwards—that you sympathized with me in a great grievance. Ah! how was it? I complained of a cake when my mother and father were out; and cook, who had made it, gave me a box on the ears for finding fault with her culinary skill; whereupon I took refuge in a cave I had made in the garden, and was followed immediately by you. I think I vowed that I would remain in the cave until the return of my mother and father. You vowed the same; and as it came on to rain after we had been sitting there some time, and as the place was not water-proof, you managed to steal into the house unseen, and bring out some rugs and mats to keep the rain out. You got wet through, Petite, and I—selfish as I was—managed to keep dry. Do you remember that?"

"Yes."

"What else can I call to mind—what special incident apart from the ordinary common-place

events in your small life and mine? Ah! I can remember the pale face of a little girl, ten years old, peeping in at a bed-room, when a little boy of fourteen, lay in a bed there, half delirious with scarlatina. I can remember the little girl bringing him oranges, and asking him, with a scared face, whether he was better. Have you forgotten that?"

She shook her head.

"And then, Petite, I can see you, though almost a child, going from cottage to cottage, and sitting down by the fire-side of rheumatically old women, talking to them, and giving them tracts, and something I dare say better than tracts. I can see you too, Petite, having your class at the school, and being patient and kind, when other young ladies were impatient and unkind. When Arabella Smith, in answer to your question as to the names of the first two sons of Adam and Eve, replied 'Sodom and Gomorrah,' you didn't send her to the bottom of the class, but took great care to have the young lady up here after service, and illumine her upon her very dangerous theo-

logical views! I can see you going out in the worst weather, and doing good everywhere. I can see you coming in, wearied and tired; and yet, when I asked you to play chess with me, or to do something I could very well have done myself, I can remember that you fell cheerfully in with my wishes and whims! Ah! and then I went away, returning every time to find that you had grown prettier—better you could not have grown. Last year when I was at home, you were a girl; and now I am at home again, and you are a—woman!

Petite listened to Lester with feelings half pleasurable, half painful. She remembered an innumerable number more characteristic incidents than he had named, and could recall kindnesses and unkindnesses received from his hands, which had entirely passed out of his memory; and it is difficult to say whether the kindnesses or unkindnesses gave her the greatest pleasure to recall.

“And are you as busy a little creature now as you always were?” asked Lester. “Your Sunday schools, your old pensioners, your grumbling

old women—do they take as much of your time as they always did?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“What a good girl you must be. What a prize to the man you marry, dear Petite!”

In spite of the silence in the room after the last words of Lester, he did not hear the quick throbbing of her heart.

“Petite!” And he put out his hand towards hers, and drew her near him. “Kiss me, Petite.”

She bent her face shyly towards his.

Ah!—it would have been better for her—it would have been better for both of them—if he had not drawn her face away from where the slanting rays of the setting sun were falling brightly on her comely head—and kissed her.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGER AND A VOICE.

ONE fine morning, some days afterwards, Dr. Kealwin, Mrs. Temple, Lester, and Petite, set out to Haystone Station. The doctor and Lester were about to leave by train, and the two ladies accompanied them to the station to see them off.

Kealwin, so genial, and so good-natured always, was picturing the agreeable life which promised to fall to Lester Temple, at Messingham Priory, and thus dissipating any unpleasant apprehensions on a too affectionate mother's part as to her son's future fate.

It was evident that the Doctor had taken a fancy to the young man. Was it, therefore, unnatural on Mrs. Temple's part, who knew that the Doctor was a bachelor, and had no very near relations, that she should see in this regard hopeful promises of Lester's being at some future day, very considerably benefited by the kindly man to whom he already owed one prosperous step in life?

"You may depend upon me, Mrs. Temple, for seeing that your son does not forget you. And I shall drop you a line occasionally as to the manner in which the young gentleman is conducting himself!"

All of which was very pleasant for Mrs. Temple to hear.

Lester and Petite were hanging behind the rest. The girl's face was sad; the encouraging words spoken by the Doctor—strange to say—made her heart seem heavy.

"You will write often, Lester, and tell us how you are getting on—will you not?" she said, very earnestly.

"Of course! I shall inundate you with letters,

and perhaps keep a diary for your especial behoof. If I find I am falling in love with either of those two beautiful ladies which make a part of Mr. Bryant's household, I shall of course let you know!"

Petite was silent, and kept her eyes upon the ground. She did not speak again until they entered the station, and then it was only to point out to Lester the figure of a man, ill clad, who was sitting in one of the waiting rooms, with his head resting on a table before him.

"Who is that?"

"I don't know. He seems a stranger. He is surely ill!" (Then speaking to one of the porters): "Do you know anything of the man there?"

"He has been sitting there some time. We don't like to disturb him; the poor wretch seems so bad. He muttered something a little while about going to London, by a third class train, and there won't be one yet awhile."

Petite clung to Lester's arm, and said:—

"Poor man, poor man! can nothing be done for him. He is very silent and very quiet!"

The man had not moved, or shewn that he heard anything, since the party entered the station, though there was noise enough about—porters rushing to and fro, the wheeling of heavy luggage, the signal bell, all the usual movement and stir before a train draws up before a platform.

Suddenly he lifted up his head ! It was when there was a slight lull in the noise, and the voice of Dr. Kealwin was heard clearly saying—

“Then he shall be in London by three!”

“He is indeed ill,” said Petite, glancing at the man, with his head now raised, and his blood-shot eyes starting from his head. “How strange he looks !” Strange indeed—his garments old, soiled, and torn, his haggard countenance agonized with fever, his sandy hair unkempt and long.

“Now, Lester”—it was the Doctor speaking from the counter of the ticket office—“you had better get your ticket. The train is drawing up !”

The stranger, after his first start at Kealwin’s voice and the wild stare bent on Petite and

Lester, had laid his head on the table once more ; but at the voice a second time, he raised it quickly again, staring wildly but vacantly before him.

Lester noticed this ; and then, as he hurried forward to obtain his ticket, he recalled a face that he had seen very like this, and very lately too ? Where ? where ? perplexingly, he asked himself this question.

But the time was up, and the train alongside of the platform.

“ Come, Lester,” cried his mother, “ the Doctor has gone forward !”

With one glance towards the mysterious occupant of the waiting-room, who had now risen, and seemed to be walking forward with difficulty, Lester Temple, accompanied by his mother and Blanche, hurried to the platform. He was soon seated at the Doctor’s side, and the hands of both were stretched out in farewell to their friends. With hearty good byes, fervent blessings, regrets, good wishes, and tears—these last from the ladies—the train drew away from the platform.

"Gone!" said the affectionate mother.

"Gone!" echoed the heart of the loving girl. Then, as they turned towards the station door, the stranger was seen struggling in the arms of two porters.

"It is he! It is he! I tell you!" he cried, vacantly. "Let me go!" Still he struggled, and still he cried, "let me go!"

"He is bad indeed!" whispered Petite.

All the time the man struggled, as though he wished to rush towards the fast receding train, and was only kept back by the force of the two men, who were baffling his purpose. Then his force was spent, and he staggered and fell down insensible.

"Almost expects he's escaped from a lunatic asylum," said one of the porters to Blanche, as the man lay prostrate on the ground.

"No, no. I don't think that," she answered. "He is only very, very ill. He must not remain here. It would be cruel! Mamma, what can we do?"

By this time the station master had joined the group, and other lookers-on, in the shape of

coal heavers, and coal carters, from an adjoining *depôt*.

Nobody, when asked, knew anything about him. Nobody had seen him until that day. One man in charge of a coal cart, coming along the road, had noticed him walking slowly towards Haystone, and taking occasional bits of rest, by sitting on the hedge-side.

"Something must be done," said Blanche, for her kind heart was touched at the piteousness of the man's state. "Oh, something must be done, mamma! Can he not be taken to Mrs. Sparrow's cottage. She has a spare room, I will pay for his lodgings, and do what I can. Poor man——"

So it was arranged that he should be taken to this woman's cottage; and kind porters, and coal carters, began getting a tumbrel ready with plenty of fresh straw to take him to the hospital that had been found for his use. In the meantime, the train rattled on towards London with Doctor Kealwin and Lester Temple, and the man who was to exercise a strange influence over both their fates, was lying insensible in

the place, whence they had just taken their departure.

"How quiet you seem, Temple," said the Doctor, looking up from his newspaper.

"I was thinking."

"Rather seriously, it would seem of your future fate."

"No. Only of the man at the station. You didn't notice him!"

"What man?"

"One poorly dressed, and ill-looking. He reminded me of some one I've seen lately; and for the life of me, I don't know who it is. And curiously enough, it was only when you spoke that he looked up, as if he recognised your voice."

"You should have pointed him out to me," answered Kealwin, settling to his newspaper again.

CHAPTER VII.

GEORGINE.

As the clock, over the stables, struck the hour of six, Dr. Kealwin and Lester Temple, seated in an open carriage, which had been sent to meet them at the station, by Mr. Bryant, came in sight of Messingham Priory ; and Lester was looking at it, with no small admiration, for the first time.

There it stood on a gently sloping hill facing them, with a bright afternoon sun shining full upon it. Though maintaining its old title, it presented no ecclesiastical characteristics ; but was an extensive modern structure of white

brick, handsome and stately in appearance, with delightful surroundings of spacious lawns, diversified by flower beds; rich pastures and orchards, through which a river wandered; woods and fir plantations here and there. At about a distance of a mile from the house was the village of Messingham, with a church spire which towered high above the cottages clustering around its base; and, at not far distant intervals, the young tutor's eye fell upon farm-houses and farm-ranges, all spacious and well to do. Altogether his first introduction to his new sphere of action which a warm afternoon sun, and an almost cloudless sky, set off to a most flattering advantage, was pleasant indeed.

Arrived at the house he was welcomed by Mr. Bryant, a tall elderly sallow-faced gentleman, with a quiet kindness which at once won his heart. Then, being told, that dinner would be on the table at half-past six, he was shewn upstairs to his room; and Dr. Kealwin accompanied Mr. Bryant into the drawing-room.

"What do you think of him?" asked the Doctor.

"He is good looking, and seems a gentleman."

"True, Bryant, he'll suit you well. He took my fancy at once. I knew his father years ago, and a capital fellow he was. And how are Georgine and Olivia?"

"Well—as they always are!"

"Just like me," laughed Kealwin, "I'm never ill. I don't know what illness is. Beyond a cold, I never had an ailment in my life; and what's more, I never shall—except old age. I met Waterlow, as we were passing through London to-day, who stared at me, and said—'Ah! Kealwin, you boast of a perennial existence. What have you done to keep your constitution so sound? I miss five years of being so old as you; and I'm done up already?' My dear Bryant, I do fancy I am one of the luckiest mortals in existence."

"Happy man you. As for me——"

"I know," laughed the Doctor. "That unhappy liver of yours is the plague of your life. As for me—I don't know that I have a liver—or a heart—or a stomach. Sure proof that I'm in good health!"

And the Doctor said this in the tone of a man who was so contented with his fortunes and himself,—having no ungratified wish, or unrealized hope—that you could not help the thought that the prospect of an existence in a higher sphere, with its untested satisfactoriness, would be rather unwelcome than otherwise, to the happy-looking, happy-speaking physician. He, indeed, seemed one of the most favoured of mortals ; with his glorious health, his easy temper, his property, and his freedom from any ties demanding thought and care !

About this time, in a handsomely appointed room, a young lady was sitting at a toilette table before a large looking-glass which reflected an especially pretty face ; with which the gazer at herself seemed perfectly satisfied.

“ You vain thing ! ” said a voice behind, in a tone of raillery. It was not necessary, for her to turn in order that she might see who had spoken, as the mirror reflected the door, where the lady, who thus addressed Georgine, had entered. It was her sister, Olivia.

"I am not vain!" said Georgine, fastening her bracelet.

"Oh! indeed you are. Fie! But perhaps on such a day as this a little vanity is pardonable. You see Harry's tutor is coming; and according to Dr. Kealwin's letters, he is a handsome man!"

"Harry's tutor, indeed! As if I should take any greater care to make myself presentable on his account!"

"Proud, as well as vain! But, Georgine, how much longer do you intend to remain here, adorning yourself? The dinner-bell will be ringing directly, and, as the tutor has been a long journey, he may want his dinner. Have compassion on him!"

"I am not going to hurry myself on his account. Is it likely?" And Georgine fastened and unfastened her bracelet, still sitting with her bright, handsome face turned towards the glass.

She was twenty-two years of age, tall, and finely built. As a girl, she had never been slim, and now her proportions were full; but for their exquisite grace they might have

seemed too full. Her complexion was clear ; and her cheeks glowed with a slightly dusky red. Her eyes were light brown ; when she was in a bad temper, or standing in an unfavourable aspect, they looked almost yellow. Nevertheless they were very fine. Her hair, so sunny brown, and bright, waved downwards in natural ripples, on either side of her forehead. Hers was the beautiful face of a very vain and wilful woman. You would know this, upon only seeing her once ; but you would not have to know her long before you became conscious that, in spite of her vanity and wilfulness, she had some wonderfully attractive qualities, whose spell you would with difficulty resist.

Olivia resembled her sister : but she was four years older, and had been four years a widow. With darker hair, darker eyes, a mouth more firm, Olivia Prince, was in the estimation of some, a better looking woman than Georgine. Whatever might be her failings, vanity, at least, did not seem one of them. And if she had pride she had so much graciousness with it, that you

failed to discover pride in any ordinary conversation with her ; and this would not be the case with her sister.

" You hear that bell," she said to Georgine. " Those bracelets will do. You say you are not adorning yourself with a view to captivating the tutor ! I don't believe you, Georgine !"

Georgine shrugged her shoulders, and slowly arose from her seat.

" Moved at last ! That's right ; give one more glance towards the glass. Such a look as that will fascinate him surely !"

" You are talking stuff !"

" Am I ? we shall see. But, perhaps, the fascination may be on the other side. He may be the captivator, and you the captivated."

So talking, they left the apartment, and entered the drawing room, where they found Mr. Bryant, Dr. Kealwin, Harry Bryant, and the gentleman who had been the subject of Olivia's banter—Lester Temple.

" What a time you have been," said Mr. Bryant, with some irritation in his voice, as his daughters entered.

"It was not my fault, papa," said Mrs. Prince, with a laugh.

"I believe you, Olivia. It was Georgine's I'm sure!" Here the lady referred to gave her head a toss. "But I must introduce you to Mr. Temple!" which he proceeded to do; the gentleman and the two ladies exchanging bows, that on the part of Mrs. Prince being especially gracious to Lester.

"You should have remembered, Georgine, that Mr. Temple has had a long journey."

Georgine vouchsafed no reply to this remark of her father, and Lester, who was watching her, saw that the fact of his long journey, and of his being in consequence in probable readiness for his dinner were matters of supreme indifference to the beautiful Miss Bryant.

"How shall I get on with this girl?" thought he; "she is vain and proud. Let her shew herself in what humour she likes, I will be her match!"

At this moment the dinner bell rang again; and at Mr. Bryant's request, Lester took Georgine into the dining-room.

As Kealwin followed, leading Mrs. Prince, she said in a low voice to him. "The tutor you have brought us for Harry is a very handsome man, Doctor. I wonder you hadn't more consideration than to introduce such a dangerous article into this house!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PROPHECY.

GEORGINE sat at the head of the table, looking very beautiful, and very vain ; Mr. Temple was on her right, doing her, from time to time, some polite little service, which she might with credit have acknowledged with more graciousness.

Glancing around the room he saw several chalk drawings. Suspecting their parentage, he asked Georgine whether they were not hers.

“ Yes,” she said carelessly.

“ Yours and somebody’s else,” added Mrs. Prince, who had heard Lester’s enquiry. “ Executed at a fashionable school, and afterwards touched up by a fashionable drawing master.”

"You shouldn't be so hard upon your sister," said the Doctor.

"It is only for her good, Dr. Kealwin. She is younger than I, and it is right that I should correct what I consider errors in one who is related to me. Vanity, arrant vanity, is one of Georgine's failings, and I am doing my best to amend this failing! Don't you think I am right, Mr. Temple?"

"You are putting Mr. Temple in a fix," remarked the Doctor, good humouredly. "He can't give his assent to one sister without giving offence to the other!"

"Mr. Temple need not be afraid of offending me;" said Georgine, her colour rising. This remark of hers showed clearly that she was so indifferent to Mr. Temple's opinion, that if he had not been an extremely good natured man he would have exhibited some token of displeasure. He shewed none, however. Georgine's vanity and pride were matched by a gentlemanly sang froid on his part, the effect of which was to irritate her the more. Leaving the drawing question, Lester, after a while, took up that of music—

"I noticed a very fine composition on the open piano, in the drawing-room. Are you fond of music?"

"Yes, very. Are you?"

"I can only reply to you as you replied to me. If I am not touching on delicate ground, who is your favourite composer?"

"Beethoven."

At this moment Mrs. Prince burst into a light laugh, whose meaning was unmistakable. "Beethoven!" she cried. "Pray don't believe her, Mr. Temple. As it is the correct thing to confess a taste for Beethoven, my sister confesses such a taste. But she can no more play him than I can play the most indifferently fashionable composer of this day. Now, Georgine, don't look so black. I am doing you a real kindness. If I didn't tell Mr. Temple this, he would be most likely asking you for one of Beethoven's sonatas, and you would only have the alternative of playing it very indifferently, or not at all." Addressing Lester—"I fear from your questions that you think we are very accomplished at Messingham. Disabuse your mind of that im-

pression, Mr. Temple. We are very stupid. Our accomplishments are lamentably second rate. What we once knew we have forgotten, and what we did know was very little. I am speaking both for myself and my sister. It is true that we play a little, and that we draw a little. I confess that I play badly, and that I draw worse. Georgine is ambitious, and you have already heard my views of her performances. You are a very clever man, Mr. Temple, and can, if you are so disposed, do both of us an immense deal of good. But I think it right to tell you, on the first day of your taking up your residence here, that you must expect very little from us, and that you must be very lenient to two ladies whose stupidity would almost win a prize. I see that Georgine doesn't like what I am saying."

"Of course Mr. Temple will believe you," said Georgine with some asperity.

"If Mr. Temple doesn't believe me now, a time will come when he will believe me. Alas ! that it should be so !"

The moment Lester first saw Georgine Bryant,

he was sure there would arise some difference of opinion between them. It was not that he felt any positive dislike to her; but he was instinctively sure they would not agree: a quarter of an hour's intimacy with her only confirmed his first impression. She showed him none of the graciousness of her sister; but she gave him to know that she was a very important personage—Miss Georgine Bryant—and that he was only her brother's tutor. Some person's pride would have been offended by this reception: others would have been painfully humiliated, or would have visited her conduct with unmistakable resentment. Lester took all good humourly. The antagonism which had only thus early risen between them, and which he felt sure circumstances would give a frequent opportunity of manifesting, he recognised as a fact. He was prepared to show Georgine that he was fully aware of it: he would bend it to his own purposes, but would show her no ungraciousness, discourtesy, indignation, or contempt.

The ladies did not stay long at dessert, and

Harry, at a signal from his father, soon followed his sisters from the room. Then Mr. Bryant turned to Lester, and addressed him a few words on the subject of his pupil.

"I don't wish you to work him too hard. He, like his younger sister, Emily, (who is staying at the sea side for her health) is delicate ; and I should not wish him therefore to study very assiduously at present. I do not take upon myself to give you any counsel as to the studies that will best suit him : your judgment will teach you what to do in this matter. With regard to yourself, I hope you will understand that I intend to regard you as one of the family. I don't think the servants will be otherwise than perfectly willing to obey you as readily as they would to obey me ; but should you have any reason to complain of inattention on their part, let me know, and I will see that you have no reason to complain again. You will be free to act as you please in this house when you are not with Harry. Have I said enough to assure you that your residence here will be comfortable?"

"You have, indeed, Mr. Bryant," responded Lester gratefully.

This was all that Mr. Bryant said relative to his duties as tutor, and to his position there.

As they retired to the drawing-room, Georgine was seated at the piano. But she arose as soon as she saw Lester.

"I should so like to hear you play that piece," said Mr. Temple, pointing to a fantasia by Thalberg.

"My sister has expatiated so eloquently upon the poverty of my accomplishments, and the deficiency of my musical taste, that it would be absurd of me to play before you!"

"If Mr. Temple wishes to hear the fantasia, I'll play it," said Mrs. Prince; "I'm not vain, and don't mind my audience having a poor opinion of my powers. I quite despair of satisfying your critical taste, Mr. Temple; but I will do my best. And then, Georgine, you will play, I know."

And she seated herself.

"By the way"—it was the Doctor speaking.

"By the way, Georgine, I've lots of music for

you and your sister ; but I left it at my house with the rest of my luggage as I came by. I executed all your special orders of course with regard to certain pieces you wished for, and then added to them some of my own selection—presents, of course, from a bachelor doctor to a patient of his who is never ill.”

“ You are very kind, Dr. Kealwin !”

“ If, however, you like them, you mustn’t thank me. I don’t know a psalm tune from a waltz. It was Mr. Temple’s good taste, and not mine, which really selected the pieces !”

“ Oh.”

“ My sister won’t thank you, Mr. Temple,” said Olivia to Lester, as she was fingering the keys, “ before she knows whether she does like the pieces.”

Georgine turned away : went to the table, and took up a book : and Mrs. Prince began playing. She had a mind to please Lester, and she played the piece so as to please him—carefully, and with due emphasis, if not very artistically.

“ There,” she said, rising, when she had finished ; “ I assure you I can’t play any better,

Mr. Temple. I've done my best. Now, Georgine!"

But Georgine only slightly raised her head, and shook it.

"Now, Georgine," said Mrs. Prince again.

"I don't care to play after I've been abused," remarked the young lady; and she bent her eyes again upon her book.

"Come, Georgine, don't be silly," said Mr. Bryant.

"Georgine will play when I ask her," said the Doctor.

It would have been a great satisfaction for her to have maintained her obstinacy, and not to have played at all; but it was, I think, a greater satisfaction to pitch hap-hazard upon the very worst piece in her *repertoire*, to play it with indescribable speed and carelessness, to blunder deliberately in the finale, and to rise from the piano on its conclusion with the air of a deeply offended young lady.

Ten minutes afterwards, tempted by the glorious May evening, Dr. Kealwin and Lester Temple were strolling on the lawn, at some distance from the drawing-room window.

"And what do you think of the ladies?"

"Mrs. Prince is a charming woman, and—"

"Georgine," interrupted the Doctor, "is an obstinate young puss."

"Yes," laughed Lester.

"But for all that," said Kealwin, "if I wanted a wife I should select the younger of the two!"

Lester started with surprise.

"Why?"

"Because she's the best!"

"The best? Obstinate—ungracious—vain—proud—"

"She's all that!"

"And her sister is amiable, and ever ready to please you!"

"Yes, she's all that too. But—"

"But what?"

"My good fellow, she's deep, and Georgine is not deep. Her faults lie on the surface: her sister's are far down. Mrs. Prince, in spite of all her self-depreciation, is ambitious. She is a flirt, and a jilt too. She has been engaged three times since her widowhood; and three times—

once at the eleventh hour—she has turned her unhappy adorer adrift. I expect there is somebody dangling after her now: a Mr. Somerton, a wealthy, independent man, living in a village some miles off. She'll play with him—making him happy and miserable by turns for months—and then she'll make him finally miserable by refusing to see him one morning, if she has an eye upon another, and a fatter fish in the water, eager for a bite at her line!"

"You surprise me. I had no idea that she was such a woman."

"I tell you this to put you on your guard with her. If you show yourself merely a friend to her, she will be the most delightful companion in the world—she'll do anything for you. If the friend is too cold a *rôle* to play, and you wish to exchange it for a more impassioned one, you'll find it out to your cost. As for Georgine—"

"As for Georgine—?"

"I fancy there is some real goodness in the girl somewhere, if it could be only brought to light. I may be wrong. You see she has had

every indulgence in the world—no mother to rebuke her for years, and a father who yields to her will in everything. But when you have been in the house some little time, you will find out what she is, and perhaps will be able to enlighten me.”

“Is—is she engaged?”

“Ha! What? And so you are interested enough in her already to be anxious upon that subject. Well, then—she is not engaged. I’m afraid she rather frightens men away from her.”

“I am much obliged to you, Doctor Kealwin, for introducing me into a household where I see every chance of being happy—in spite of the hauteur of the young lady who reigns mistress.”

After sauntering about the lawn a few minutes, they returned again to the drawing-room. Lester Temple, during his absence, had been the subject of conversation, carried on in a low voice between Olivia and her sister.

“Well! What do you think of him?” asked the former.

“I haven’t thought anything about him.”

"A transparent falsehood! I must say you behaved rudely. But come, answer my question; what do you really think of him?"

"Oh, he's well enough!"

"Well enough! Lucid explanation of a young lady's views relative to an exceedingly handsome man! My dear Georgine, you have hitherto enjoyed a wonderful immunity from that complaint, which seizes young ladies in quite an early stage of their career. You have never yet ceased to care enough for yourself to regard any one else. I should not wonder if Providence, by way of punishing you, had thrown this handsome tutor in your path, to be a centre of infection in which you will be an early and helpless victim."

"Olivia. You are stupid!"

"No; I am prophetic! You treat him indifferently; you refuse to play when he asks you; you are only as civil as the rules of good society compel you to be;—all of which points to the destiny awaiting you. And, by the way, Georgine, I've previsions of something else as well: only, if I told them, I should make you so vain."

“Never mind my vanity.”

“Well, if you don’t fall in love with him, he’ll perpetrate the folly of—”

“Hush—he’s returning with the Doctor,” said Georgine.

This beautiful, vain woman gave him half a glance, and then sat down at the piano. If Mr. Temple chose to be guilty of the folly prophesied by Olivia, let him ! Such beings as he were destined to be the slaves of well-born, unattainable women. As to the notion that she could ever regard him save with unutterable indifference, it was beyond the range of probabilities ! Having enjoyed a flutter of vanity and pride, she struck a few chords upon the piano, and some light, pleasant notes fell agreeably on Lester’s ear. He glanced at her from time to time ; the perfect development of her womanly beauty was an irresistible charm.

The May evening ran its course. The Doctor and Olivia now and then exchanged a few jokes. Mr. Bryant lay dozing on a couch. Through the half open window there stole in the fragrance of the spring air. Lights glimmered on the

piano and the table, and flashed brightly in lustres on the mantel-piece.

No wonder then that with such influences the prophecy of Mrs. Prince regarding one at least, began to work.

CHAPTER IX.

LESTER'S PROGRESS WITH HIS PUPIL AND WITH GEORGINE. •

LESTER TEMPLE found his life at Messingham Priory very agreeable. The kindness of Mr. Bryant was great and unvarying; his life was not only pleasant, it was also easy. And this was an especial recommendation to a gentleman who did not care to exert himself very greatly.

At half-past ten, he and his pupil entered the study—a pleasant apartment upon the ground floor, opening upon the garden. Here they remained until twelve, reading Cæsar and Virgil,

Xenophon and Homer. At one there was luncheon; and at half-past two, he and his pupil returned to the study again, leaving it at four. By this hour his duties were over; and he could do what he listed.

Harry was a satisfactory pupil, and gave him but little trouble. Treated therefore so considerately by the master of the house, and finding that the discharge of his duties was rendered easy by the conduct of the lad entrusted to him, it would have been strange indeed if Lester Temple had not found the early days of his sojourn at Messingham exceptionally pleasant. Mrs. Prince was always kind, gracious, and considerate: and when he called to mind what the Doctor had said respecting her, he was puzzled, as he would have been, had a very ingenious riddle been propounded to him, which was apparently impossible of solution. Very little passed between him and Georgine Bryant. Without treating him rudely, she treated him with a coolness which he would have been blind not to see.

Perhaps she would have treated him with less

coolness, had he shewn so little inclination to resent it. Resent it, he never did, either by discourtesy or indifference : and the lady was puzzled to know why.

I don't think Georgine Bryant disliked Lester, for he was one of those persons whom it seems impossible absolutely to dislike. He was so generous, so easy in temper, and yet withal so firm when it was necessary to his credit to be firm, and while always ready to hold his own he was yet so eager to please others as well. Georgine simply felt that she would like to pick a quarrel with him on some matter ; and this feeling was akin to that of a mistress who does her best to tease a dog for which she has rather a liking than otherwise, and to see what amount of ill temper the good-natured animal will shew when it has suffered a great deal of annoyance.

As for Lester, he was aware how matters stood ; and saw clearly what it was that Georgine was seeking. He neither avoided it, nor courted it ; and one morning the event happened.

It was half-past eleven o'clock. Harry had

just begun writing out a translation of Xenophon, and it would occupy him till twelve, at which hour his duties were over for the morning. Lester Temple, seated opposite him at the same table, was looking over a Latin translation made that day by his pupil, and correcting the blunders when he found them. It was a wonderfully pleasant morning; the French windows were open, and the bright sun came cheerily into the room. The birds were singing merrily in the garden. It was "study" under the most favourable circumstances, and would have been pleasant to the greatest dullard or the greatest hater of a book in the world.

Looking up from his papers, and glancing towards the garden, Lester saw through an open shrubbery, two horses being saddled, and afterwards led in the direction of the front door of the house.

Two minutes afterwards Georgine entered the library, dressed in a riding habit.

"Harry, I want you. You must come for a ride with me this morning!"

Harry looked up from his book. Lester spoke.

"I am sorry to say, Miss Bryant, that your brother's duties are not yet over, and that he cannot leave until they are."

"Harry you must come. The groom is ill, and cannot accompany me. The horses, yours and mine, are already saddled and at the door."

"You hear what Mr. Temple has said," responded Harry.

"That's all nonsense! Mr. Temple knows very well that in losing a half hour you will not lose much. Come!"

"I cannot allow it," said Lester firmly. "Harry is not worked very hard; and I cannot suffer him to leave this room until twelve o'clock—in five-and-twenty minutes' time. Perhaps you can wait until he is ready to accompany you?"

"I cannot wait, Mr. Temple," she said quickly. "This is most annoying."

"I am very sorry," remarked Lester.

"I do not believe it. Had any one else asked for a few minutes remission of Harry's duties you would have granted it."

"Indeed, I should not. I am sure Mr.

Bryant would not wish his son to leave his duties until they were finished."

Georgine's face flushed red. A step was heard outside the door at this moment; it was Mr. Bryant's.

"Papa!"

He entered. One glance shewed him that something was amiss.

"Papa, as the groom is ill, and cannot accompany me, I asked Harry to come; and Mr. Temple would not allow him—"

"To leave his room," said Lester quietly, "until twelve o'clock. I have had Mr. Bryant's approval of the hours of study fixed by me; and I thought it wrong to deviate from them."

"Yes—yes," said Mr. Bryant, in a tone of vexation, "it was quite right. You should not come in here, disturbing your brother during his studies, Georgine. Your business is not so very important but that you can wait a few minutes, I think."

"It was only that Mr. Temple wished to annoy me, papa. It was not that he was so anxious about his pupil."

"Hush! Georgine! you are wrong, I am sure. Come! it will soon be twelve o'clock; and then Harry will be able to leave."

Georgine darted an angry glance towards Lester, and then followed her father from the room. When she reached the front hall, and saw the horses standing before the door in charge of a man, she opened the door and said:—

"You may take the horses back. I shall not want them."

Then she entered the dining-room. Her sister and Dr. Kealwin were there.

"What's amiss, Georgine?" asked the Doctor.

"Only that the tutor you have brought us for Harry is the most impudent man I ever knew."

"Wheugh! what's he done?"

"Never mind, Dr. Kealwin, what he's done. He's only been very rude to me. He ought to know his place better."

As Mr. Bryant had not entered the room with her, to explain her grievance, the Doctor and Mrs. Prince were fain to guess it.

“So you’ve picked a quarrel with him—have you?” said Olivia, looking up from some pieces of music, which Dr. Kealwin had brought from London for her and her sister. “I thought you wanted to do something of the kind. Be careful, Georgine. Those quarrels are dangerous things; because they entail a making up.”

Greeting her sister’s pretty laugh with a sneer, Georgine sat down, and drummed the floor with her feet. The Doctor looked at her slyly, “What will it come to?” he thought, “are these two young people only playing? or do they really hate each other?”

Several minutes passed in the room disturbed by no sound save Georgine’s drumming. The Doctor read the *Times* with placid enjoyment; and Mrs. Prince looked carefully through the music. Suddenly a clock on the mantelpiece began striking the hour of twelve; its last stroke had hardly died away, before Harry burst into the room.

“Here I am,” he cried, “with Mr. Temple’s compliments!”

Georgine’s eyes flamed angrily.

"Did he send that message?"

"No! He only said, after he had looked at his watch, 'you may go to your sister now. I hope it will not be too late for her ride.'"

"But it is. I have sent the horses back to the stables again. Go. I don't want you."

"What a girl you are."

Georgine rose from her chair and left the room. Dr. Kealwin and Mrs. Prince exchanged glances. "They will either hate each other like the deuce—this Lester Temple, and Georgine, or they'll do just the opposite." So thought the Doctor. Olivia smiled meaningly as she turned over the music.

"You are very kind indeed to bring us such a lot of nice new pieces," she said at last. "The most ambitious were selected by Georgine. Will she play them, I wonder, before a gentleman of such critical taste as Mr. Temple?"

"Do you think your sister was offended greatly by what I said yesterday?" asked Lester Temple, as he was superintending his pupil's studies the next morning in the library.

"I expect she was, though I don't see why she should have been. But she's a queer girl—is Georgine. You know she wouldn't come down to luncheon yesterday; and she was in the sulks, I believe, the whole afternoon."

"Hark! what's that?"

"It is only Georgine or Olivia at the piano."

Lester arose, and opened the door of the library, and then he could clearly hear some one practising—apparently for the first time, from the imperfection of the playing,—one of the most difficult concertos of Dussek. As the strains reached his ears he remembered that it was a piece which Doctor Kealwin had purchased on his way with him through London, and that it was one which Georgine had commissioned the Doctor to buy especially for her.

"Oh, that's Georgine playing, I could swear," said Harry. "She always orders such swell selections, and can never manage them. She's so precious vain, Mr. Temple."

"That's a difficult piece," said Lester. "Hark." Mingling with the strains of the music was the

unmistakable laughter of Mrs. Prince. Then they heard her saying:—

“You can't play that! What nonsense, Georgine, it is of you to attempt it!”

Still Georgine kept thumping away—blundering at every fifth note, and altogether doing but scant justice to the concerto. Lester smiled grimly, and murmured:—“There's nothing like perseverance.”

Several minutes passed during which Georgine manfully stuck to the concerto, despite her sister's railleries and laughter, which Lester and Harry could distinctly hear. At last the music ceased, and Mrs. Prince was heard to say:—

“Your efforts are much too ambitious, Georgine; I told you so; and if you attempt to play such a selection as that before Mr. Temple, he will find out what I say to be true.”

“Mr. Temple! Indeed! What does he know about music? It is all very grand for him to confess such an elevated taste; but for my part I don't believe he knows any more about music than——”

Simile failing, Mrs. Prince said:—

" Yourself !"

Lester Temple smiled rather sardonically as he heard this ; and he smiled more when, a few minutes afterwards, he heard the two ladies open the front door and go out by it. Glancing at his watch he saw that it was twenty minutes to twelve.

" Are your sisters gone for a walk ?" he asked.

" Yes ; if their best hats don't hang on the wall, they have gone beyond the grounds ; if they do hang there, they are only in the garden or the plantation somewhere. Shall I look ?"

" Yes."

Harry ran out into the hall, returning immediately.

" They haven't gone far ; their nattiest hats hang there still. They are only in the plantations."

" Are they likely to be out long ?"

" About half an hour, I dare say."

Lester said no more. At twelve he dismissed his pupil, who soon left the house with

his dogs. Then Lester repaired to the drawing-room.

Ten minutes afterwards, Mrs. Prince and Georgine, returning from their stroll, heard, as they approached the house, the windows of the drawing-room being open, the concerto of Dussek played by one who was evidently a master of the instrument and of the music.

"Georgine, who's that?" said Mrs. Prince, with a voice of profound astonishment. She had no need to ask that question, for they were before the windows now, and through them they saw seated at the piano Lester Temple.

Georgine turned red.

"I didn't think he could play," she whispered.

They approached the windows, and listened attentively until he had finished the piece; then Mrs. Prince clapped her hands and cried "bravo!" Georgine, however, shewed no signs of satisfaction. It was by no means pleasant for her to hear this tutor, whom she affected to despise and treated almost rudely, execute so skilfully a piece, which her vanity had urged her

to attempt, but which her vanity had not enabled her to accomplish.

"Thank you, Mr. Temple," said Mrs. Prince, "you played that beautifully; Georgine attempted it before we went out, but couldn't get through half-a-dozen bars."

"It is not easy," said Lester; "if Miss Bryant has any difficulty, perhaps I may be able to render her some little assistance."

"I dare say I shall be able to play it when I have tried it a second time," said Georgine, indifferently; "I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Temple, for your offer. I had no idea you were such a good pianist."

At Olivia's request Lester went through the piece again. In the battle that was going on between him and Georgine Bryant he had gained an advantage over her. The question that now arose in his mind was, whether she would not be less disposed than ever to be friendly with him, or whether she would succumb, and make a virtue of necessity? Though it was pleasant for him to obtain a victory over her, it was, curiously enough, not pleasant for him to hear

her bantered by her sister. Georgine was Mrs. Prince's butt when Mrs. Prince was more than usually charged with good-natured sarcasm; and it seemed to give her special pleasure if she could make Georgine her butt in the presence of Lester.

As Olivia and her sister were ascending the stairs a few minutes afterwards, Mrs. Prince said,

"My dear, he has done you! He'll turn out an admirable Crichton! If you were less ambitious, or, rather, to speak more correctly, if you were less vain, you would get on better, Georgine."

Miss Bryant did not think so, for only on the afternoon of the same day, she gave proof that her vanity was in no wise lessened by her sister's good advice.

There were some studies in coloured crayons lying on the table, a present from the urbane Dr. Kealwin. These studies were by Jullien and Delafosse, exceedingly pretty, all of them, and a good many difficult of execution—Haideës, vivandieres, and other beauties with languishing eyes and wonderful hair.

"I'm a modest woman," said Mrs. Prince, "and I shall select the easiest I can find to draw first."

Georgine, who did not profess to be modest in the sense alluded to by her sister, selected the most difficult drawing of all. Olivia burst out laughing.

"You surely haven't vanity enough to fancy you can do that, you silly girl?—you could fly as easily.

"I can do it, and I will do it," cried Georgine, angrily; "you always think I'm as great a fool as——"

"Myself. Go on."

"I didn't say that; but do this I will."

Olivia shrugged her shoulders.

"I am sorry to say," she replied, "that I don't believe you can."

"You will believe differently in a few days," said Georgine hotly.

"In a few days! What perseverance 'we' have!"

"In a few days—in a week."

"I am glad to hear you say so. If you can

make a drawing with any tolerable resemblance to that copy, I shall be delighted with the accomplishments of my sister, and will at once apologise for all the disparaging remarks which have fallen from my lips with regard to her skilfulness with the pencil."

Georgine bit her lip.

"I won't see your drawing until you have finished it," said Mrs. Prince, "nor express any curiosity about it. You fix a week for completing it. At the end of the week I shall ask you to favour me with an inspection."

"Very well; it shall be a bargain," responded Miss Bryant. "At the end of the week I will show you that I have done what I said I would."

"Agreed!—you may depend upon me, Georgine. I won't disturb your artistic ardour, nor shall my curiosity prompt me to peep into your portfolio. At the end of the week I shall expect to find in you an artist of rare accomplishments,—accomplishments, by the way, which have been rather rapidly developed. And now I won't say a word to you about the drawing for seven days."

Harry Bryant had been in the room during this colloquy, and when he retired to the library with Lester Temple, he immediately communicated to him the substance thereof.

"Will your sister be able to do it, do you think?" asked the tutor.

"No; she couldn't do it any more than I could. Oh! won't Olivia crow when she finds that Georgine's boasts have ended, as they will most likely end, in producing a Guy!"

"Can I depend on you, Harry?" asked Lester, suddenly.

"Of course you can."

"I was thinking that I could manage to give Mrs. Prince a surprise—perhaps your other sister too. I can draw. You tell me that it is arranged that Georgine should spend two or three hours in the breakfast-room every day over her drawing, and that Mrs. Prince is not to see it until it is finished. Now every day, after Georgine has done her morning's drawing, when she and her sister are out, I will go into the breakfast-room and touch up what she has done, if I find that it needs it. This gradual

improvement of her work she will be scarcely likely to notice; but by the end of the week, if she can draw at all, it will make her sketch a satisfactory copy of the original. Can I depend upon you for keeping this secret?"

"Oh, yes; it will be great fun. And can you really draw?"

Lester nodded.

"What a clever chap you are! We shall never cease finding out what you can do."

"Don't make me vain, sir. Go on with your Cæsar."

The next day, some twenty minutes after twelve, Mrs. Prince and her sister were heard to leave the house. Lester had previously ascertained that Georgine had remained two hours or more in the breakfast-room, and it was presumable that she had devoted that time to her crayon drawing. Upon entering the room and opening the portfolio which lay on a side table there, he found that his suspicions were correct. Georgine had sketched the outline of Haideë. Comparing the work she had already done with the copy, it was not difficult for him to see that

Miss Bryant's artistic powers were rather in an imperfect state, and that there existed strong probabilities against her ever making a very effective drawing. Lester at once seated himself, and put in a few vigorous touches. So dexterously, however, was the work done, that Georgine would hardly detect it. On the next day, after she and her sister had gone out, he went to the breakfast-room again, and once more touched up her drawing. Her second efforts had no tendency to alter the view he had formed on the previous day: she was manifestly unequal to the work she had undertaken. For the success of his plan it was necessary that Georgine should have no suspicion as to what was going on, and Lester was careful to question Harry whether his sister had said anything which might have been provoked by her suspicion of a second artist having gone over her work. Harry informed him that she entertained none whatever as yet; and on the third morning he was present when she opened her portfolio. For five days Mr. Temple touched up her work; and on the sixth day had

the satisfaction of seeing, or, rather, of making that work nearly complete. It was unnecessary for Georgine to do anything further to it on the seventh day, when she had agreed to show it to her sister, and in Lester's opinion it was scarcely likely that she would. The course he had taken had all along been unsuspected; for he was careful to make each day's work done by himself as unobtrusive as possible, while the sum total of it converted an indifferent drawing into a very presentable copy of the original.

The morning of the seventh day arrived at last. Pleading head-ache, which, I am sorry to say, was an imaginary ailment, suggested by Lester Temple, Harry managed to avoid his scholastic duties. The consequence was that he and Lester remained in the breakfast room, when the meal was over, with Mrs. Prince and Georgine.

"Am I to see your drawing this morning?" asked Olivia.

"Yes," said Georgine, triumphantly; "I have done it, so that I shall win admiration,

even from you ! I've been putting a few touches in this morning, before breakfast." (Lester winced : it was just possible these few touches might have some damaging effect.) " Harry, get me that portfolio."

The portfolio was got, and placed on the table, with an air of victory. Georgine opened it, and then laid the original drawing and her own copy side by side, before her sister.

" There !"

Mrs. Prince opened her eyes with astonishment. " It is done better than I thought it would have been."

" Don't be so hasty in judging what I can do again," said Georgine. " I told you I could manage it ; I have. What have you to say ?"

" I offer you my best apologies. I have misjudged you. Henceforth, in all matters of art, I shall bow to your opinion !" answered Mrs. Prince ; taking up the two drawings, and examining them carefully.

As she said this, her eyes happened to fall upon Harry, who was standing by the side of Lester, at the window, striving, ineffectually, to

subdue a significant grin. The look which Lester gave in return, was not without its meaning; and then some glimmering of the truth dawned upon Mrs. Prince.

"Do you draw, Mr. Temple?" asked Olivia, quickly.

"A little."

Georgine gave no sign; and Mrs. Prince quietly laid the drawings down, without hinting her suspicion either to Lester or her sister.

They were only suspicions, as yet; but a short interview with Harry, from whom, with a little dexterous manœuvring, she extracted an account of the whole affair, not only confirmed them, but justified some idle words lightly spoken to Georgine, as well.

"Do you know what I told you the first evening of Mr. Temple's coming here?" asked Mrs. Prince, when she again saw her sister.

"No," responded Georgine, carelessly.

"Think."

"I daresay you said a good many things I have forgotten."

"Very likely. But something I said, which I

am sure has not escaped your memory. Speaking jestingly, I prophesied Harry's tutor would fall in love with you. I was no false prophet!"

"Has he dared to say anything?" flashed Georgine.

"No. But every day, after you had left your drawing, he went and touched it up, so that you might win a triumph over me! How do you relish the truth which this discovery suggests?"

"I didn't think he would be such a fool!" was Georgine's response, as she turned away.

"Fool or no fool," said Mrs. Prince, *sotto voce*, "Folly is contagious!"

CHAPTER X.

FORESHADOWING.

LESTER heard frequently from Blanche Legh, and her letters were very pleasant to him. She wrote of her quiet home life in the happiest manner. As he read her letters he little guessed how much meaning they had for her, or how eagerly she watched for his in return. It was not often that she had anything very important to tell. And the only incidents yet of any special importance were those referring to that person at the station, whose strange appearance had struck Lester on the morning of his departure, and who, afterwards, to his great good fortune, had fallen to the tender care of Mrs. Temple

and Blanche. They procured him hospital in the cottage of a poor widow in the village, who was glad to let an unoccupied room. For many days he was insensible from a fever, brought on apparently by exhaustion and want of food. The widow woman nursed him; and every day, Petite, when she went to make enquiries, brought him some little delicacy which she thought he might fancy. On the eleventh day he left his bed; and Petite was admitted to him, as he sat in Mrs. Sparrow's easiest chair. He was still very weak.

"You have been very kind to me, Miss, I hear, and I thank you much for it. It was your face I saw at the station, was it not? on the day I fell ill."

"Yes."

"I was half crazy, then. I had had strange feelings for days past, and I had walked far and eaten little."

"You will soon be well now," said Petite, "and be able to resume your journey."

"Ah! my journey! my journey!" he replied, with strange sadness.

"You have friends—have you not?" timidly suggested Petite.

"Friends! I may have one, perhaps; but he thinks me dead. Ah! and it would have been better for me if I were!"

Albeit he spoke these words sadly, almost despairingly, he spoke them with an under-current tone of bitterness, which struck painfully on the ears of Blanche.

She wished to ask him where he came from, and whither he was going; his sharp observation detected her curiosity.

"You want to know something about me, Miss; I am sorry I cannot satisfy you. Never mind where I came from when you first saw me, or where I shall go when I leave this place: we shall most likely never meet again. Stay—" and his eyes gleamed with a strange light, and he put his hand to his forehead, "I remember something which I have forgotten ever since I was taken ill. I heard a voice at the station which aroused me strangely; and afterwards I saw a face which startled me more. Who was it speaking? Did you know him?"

"It was Dr. Kealwin!"

"KEALWIN!" cried the man, with the emphasis of recognition. "KEALWIN! You know him?"

"Yes. Do you?"

He parried the question. "What is he doing—is he well—wealthy—happy?"

"He seemed so."

A most bitter look crossed the face of the stranger, at these words.

"Where does he live?" enquired the sick man, after a while.

"At Messingham, in Essex."

There was another silence; and when the man spoke again, it was upon another subject.

"I have heard the woman, who nursed me, speak of you as Miss Legh. Do your father and mother live here?"

"I have no father or mother living. I have been adopted by a Mr. Temple. He is lately dead, and I am living with his widow."

The man clutched his hands together, and fixed his eyes sharply on the girl.

"Temple—Temple!" he kept murmuring the word over and over again.

"Have you lived long with him?" he enquired.

"As long as I can remember."

After this he relapsed into silence, and looked broodingly in the fire. Thinking that he might be fatigued, Blanche rose, and made a movement to go.

"I will call again to-morrow," she said.

The man thanked her for her kindness to him; and as she left the room fixed his eyes upon her more wistfully than ever.

"Yes—she is like her—strangely like her."

The following day Blanche came again. He was then walking about the room, and had improved in appearance since she saw him last. Dexterously, and without provoking curiosity on her part, he put many questions about her life with the Temples; and when she had left he was similarly inquisitive of Mrs. Sparrow.

"She's the sweetest young creature I ever see," said the widow. "It do one good to speak to her. I hope she'll find a nice husband,

who'll love her, and be kind to her. The man who did a cruelty to her would deserve——"

"What?" sharply enquired the stranger.

"A good deal more than I should wish any of my friends to suffer!"

"Ah! you are right. And so would that man deserve who treated any one so gentle, so kind, so loving as she is—eh?"

"He would! But, I say, how fierce you look. Just as if——"

"Well?"

"—You had a mind to treat somebody as he deserved to be treated."

The fierce look died out of the man's eyes, and he sat very still.

Three days afterwards when Blanche Legh entered his room, she found him dressed for walking, not in the shabby clothes he had worn when she first saw him, but in some respectable looking habiliments procured for him by her kindness.

"I was waiting to see you, Miss. I am going away to-day."

"To-day?" said Petite, in surprise.

"Yes. I feel well enough to move; and the doctor says I may go. You are not very likely to see me again. I am going, I hardly know where—it may be to no good. But I can thank you for your kindness honestly enough."

Blanche put out her hand to his. As he drew it away he knew that there was money in it.

He bade Mrs. Sparrow farewell, and, preceded by Blanche, left the cottage. She walked some way with him towards the station.

"It seems curious that a fortnight ago I should have been nearly mad, and now quite well. Sometimes I fancy I shall not remain so long. Perhaps you think, that, in return for the great kindness you have shewn me, I ought to tell you my name. It isn't a good name, or I would tell it. But, if you ever believe that a bad man can be made good; if you really believe there is pardon for the worst, think of me when you are praying. Good creatures like you pray. It is many a year since my lips framed a prayer."

Blanche's heart sickened, and she was about to speak, when he interrupted her—

"I know what you would say to me. You are horrified to hear me speak so. I am not good; it will take me a good deal to be so; but your prayers *may—may*, I say, be of more avail than any good advice you can give me."

"There is pardon and peace for the worst," she said.

"So I have been told. I wish I could feel that such was the truth. If there is pardon and peace for you, there is none for me; and I fear there never will be! My whole life has been one long sin, and I can never forget it!"

After a few more words on both sides the two parted. The man stood looking at her as she tripped down the hill towards the village. He saw her enter a cottage. He watched for her reappearance. When she again stepped forth it was only to trip across the road and enter another.

"Always doing some kindness," the strange man said, musingly, "just as that other one

did. In so many respects they are alike. Alike in face, alike in act. There is no doubt. She is *his* daughter; she is *her* daughter. And what is there to be got by revealing the secret? She is happy now. Would she be happy if she knew all?" Then he said aloud—

"What brought my steps here, Chance, Providence, or the Devil?"

With one more glance down the road, to see whether Blanche appeared again, he turned on his heel towards the station.

His mind, busy on many things, he took his place in a third class carriage. His destination was London; and it might be London without a home, without a friend, when he arrived there.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. CALLEY.

MANY pleasant weeks passed to Lester Temple at the Priory, and their agreeable monotony was little disturbed. There came very frequently a certain Mr. Somerton, who devoted his time chiefly to Olivia Prince. This gentleman, as Doctor Kealwin informed the tutor, was her last admirer. His visits were almost daily. To Lester he said but little; indeed, his conversation was almost entirely bestowed upon Mrs. Prince; and when it ever so happened that he was with anyone else, he was silent and sullen. His importance, therefore, in the pleasantly gliding life of the Priory was not significant. His worship of Olivia was unmistakable; and

the way in which she treated him bore out what Kcalwin had told Lester, the first night of his coming to Messingham. Her graciousness to him was most marked ; but if he was blind to the fate that seemed to loom before him, Temple was not.

Suddenly there was some stir in the life at the Priory. One morning, when Lester came down to breakfast, Mrs. Prince, amidst much laughter, was reading this letter ;—

“ MY DEAR OLIVIA,

“ I dare say you think I am a tiresome old woman, when I tell you that I shall arrive at the Priory some time to-morrow, morning, afternoon, or evening ; I don't know which. Illness has suddenly broken out in the house where I now am, and as I am fearful it may be infectious, I shall leave it as soon as possible. Don't be afraid, my dear ; I don't think, at least I know it is not so ; and you need therefore have no apprehension of catching the small-pox, or scarlatina, or measles, or typhus, from *me*. But I hate to be in a house where there is anybody

ill, and so I am coming over to you. I dare say you will be very angry, my dear, but I am going to bring my daughter Jane with me. As her husband has been absent some days every week for months past, she has been staying occasionally with me, and has accompanied me in my visits, with my portmanteau, boxes, and dog. She is a silly woman, and likes her husband a good deal more than he deserves, and contemplates staying in your house with great pleasure. Business—railway business, or some other roguery, will bring him into your neighbourhood almost immediately ; and he writes to his wife, saying that he shall endeavour to run over and stay a day or two with his old friend, Dr. Kealwin, who, in my opinion, my dear, is an unutterable humbug, and, therefore, a fit companion for James Hamperton. And now, as I've told you why we are coming, I won't waste any more paper. I never carry either that or stamps with me, but depend upon my friends for such necessities. You must therefore acquit me of extravagance in writing on such thick paper as the present, which I wonder people are so absurd

as to use. Has Georgine got a beau? You've half-a-dozen, I suppose.

"Affectionately yours,

"SARAH CALLEY."

"There's no help for it, papa," said Mrs. Prince; "we must put up with Mrs. Calley. As for me, you know I rather like her."

Mrs. Calley with her daughter arrived at luncheon. She was hard upon seventy years old, but had the liveliness and the appetite of a schoolgirl. In person she was very short and thin. Her face was small, dark in complexion, and lined with many a wrinkle. Her brown eyes were marvellously intelligent; and resolution expressed itself in every twist of her thick, iron grey hair. Not her least striking feature were her teeth—white, strong and healthy still.

Her daughter, Mrs. Hamperton, though resembling her mother in figure, was in other respects very different. She had large, soft, hazel eyes, a meek and anxious expression of countenance. As a girl, she had been pretty, and in middle life she preserved many traces of

her earlier good looks. She was quiet ; and Mrs. Calley was noisy. She was contented with the attention of her neighbour, while Mrs. Calley would absorb that of the whole room. She rarely ventured to dissent from the opinion of any one, and then only in the mildest voice. Mrs. Calley would have contradicted the most illustrious lady in the land.

As Mrs. Calley had specified no particular time when her arrival might be expected, luncheon was more than half over before she appeared. She burst unexpectedly into the room, amidst a clatter of knives and forks, and at once made for Olivia, whom she embraced with effusion. Glasses rattled ; Mr. Bryant stared, and rose to give her a polite welcome. But her appearance had a more conspicuous effect on Mr. Somerton, who was seated next to Olivia Prince, and who had been fortifying himself by Moselle and cold chicken preparatory to making that offer, which had been so long in embryo.

Mrs. Calley threw a quick glance round the room, and with other things comprehended the

presence of Mr. Somerton, as well as his latent design.

The welcome and the necessary introductions over, she immediately seated herself, and asked for a piece of cold chicken, which stood opposite Mr. Somerton.

“The liver wing, sir, if you please.”

As she said this, Mr. Somerton blushed, and felt very uncomfortable. He had eaten the liver wings of two cold fowls; the others had disappeared too, and now there was nothing for the hungry old lady but a drumstick or two.

“I’m very sorry,” he stammered; “but——”

“Never mind, sir. You had a perfect right to eat what you found first;” for it somehow occurred to the shrewd old lady that she must thank Mr. Somerton for her deprivation. “I hope you gentlemen won’t wait for me,” she said. “I appreciate your politeness in staying; but, pray, don’t let my presence detain you.”

This being especially directed against Mr. Somerton, had the effect of adding to his discomfort, and causing him to rise shortly afterwards from the table. He had called that

morning with a pretty definite purpose of asking Olivia Prince the most important question that a man can ask a woman. Before luncheon his courage had not been sufficiently up to the mark ; and now that he was a better man for Moselle and cold fowl, the arrival of this horrid old woman, Mrs. Calley, would render it necessary to postpone his intentions until a more favourable period.

“Who is he?” asked Mrs. Calley, when all the gentlemen had departed.

“Mr. Somerton, of Ashley Hall,” answered Mrs. Prince.

“Somerton ! Oh ! I know ! He’s rich—eh ?”

“Yes.”

“But he’s a fool. All the Somertons have been. I knew his father, and his grandfather. Both of ’em were, and yet they managed to make money, and to marry into money. Not one of the family for generations has had anything in him. This young man’s grandfather was a maltster at Jobbington. What with cheating his neighbours, and starving himself,

he managed to make a deal of money, and married, rather late in life, a Miss Ralling, daughter of a man in the firm of Hopper, Ralling & Co., brewers. Old Ralling left his daughter all his money. From that time the fortunes of these Somertons were made. The son of the old man married a banker's daughter; and the chit who lunched here, and ate the liver wings, if I am not mistaken, is their only child. I'm told he will have five thousand a year. Well—he'll be dear at that. Who is he hankering after—Olivia or Georgine?"

"Not after me," responded Georgine.

"Then it's you, Olivia. What do you think of him?"

"I've seen handsomer, and I've seen cleverer men!" was Mrs. Prince's response.

"And who is that other fellow—the young man with the crisp beard, who left with Harry?"

"Oh, he's only Harry's tutor," said Georgine.

"Tutor! h'm! I don't dislike the look of him. But it isn't likely that one of you girls would go falling in love with a tutor!"

"I should not," Mrs. Prince answered.

Georgine only shrugged her shoulders.

Mrs. Calley fixed her quick black eyes on the young lady, and so significant was the gaze, that Miss Bryant blushed.

"Don't you be romantic, Georgine," said Mrs. Calley, "and fall in love with a tutor. You can do something better than that if you try; though, of the two, I'd rather have him than the other!"

And then Mrs. Calley had a glass of wine; and when she had finished it, she rated herself for talking about courting and such nonsense.

"But Lord!" she said, "it's what we all do—from thirteen to three-score—court and talk about it, and after all what is it?—Jane, what is it?" and here she turned to her daughter, and quite startled that meek-looking lady by the suddenness of her appeal.

"Married life is surely an invaluable blessing," Mrs. Hamperton began saying.

"Married life an invaluable blessing, indeed! Fiddle-de-dee! Does your Hamperton make

your existence very happy? Isn't he always out, sometimes by the month together? When he calls himself at home, isn't he over his papers, and his books, and his accounts?"

"Mr. Hamperton, as a man of business, is obliged to absent himself from his wife's company a good deal," remarked Mr. Hamperton's wife.

"Yes, so he is—so he is! And nice excuses he has when he comes home. A man all over. They are all alike. Women talk about marriage as if the subject was a pleasant one; but let 'em experience it a few years, and it's not all honey. My dears, I've done my luncheon, and now I'll go and take off my bonnet. Come along, Jane. You look happy at the idea of seeing your husband. Dear, dear!"

Of Mrs. Calley's past life little need be said. She was a widow lady of some property, residing in London. Her acquaintances were innumerable, and she might have been out visiting every week of the year, had she so wished. She had been intimate with Mr. Bryant since he was a boy; and Mrs. Prince was the

favourite of his family. Some of our friends we like because they are good, or kind, or beautiful. But the source of Mrs. Calley's affection for Olivia was none of these qualities, I fear. She liked her because she was worldly, ambitious, and sharp, and had the cunning to keep the majority of people from finding out that she was so. Mrs. Calley had picked out Olivia's first husband, who had a high appointment in the Indian civil service, with talents which gave promise of enabling him to rise to a very enviable position. Moreover he was, though no fool, a governable man. In his office he might show himself a master, but in his home he would be a very obedient servant of his wife. Ambitious Mrs. Calley's hopes relative to her young friend, Olivia, were doomed to disappointment when her husband died, a few years after their marriage. All anticipations of knowing her as reigning an Anglo-Indian queen of society in Bombay were scattered to the winds. But ever since Mrs. Prince's return to England, a handsome, fascinating, young widow, Mrs. Calley had had her interests at heart, and had more than

once cast her quick eye around her gentlemen acquaintances, to see whether there was one amongst them whose qualifications fitted him to become the husband of her favourite. As yet, her observation had failed to discover one. When she guessed the nature of Mr. Somerton's hopes, she immediately scouted the idea of his being a desirable *parti*. It is true that he had one good qualification—he was rich; but he was, as she said, a fool, and in her opinion Olivia merited something better.

About an hour before dinner, Mrs. Calley found herself alone with Olivia.

“And now, my dear,” she said, “tell me the truth. Is there anything really between you and that Mr. Somerton?”

“Between us?—do you mean, am I engaged to him?”

“Yes.”

“To speak the truth, then, I am not.”

“But—but, my dear, don't you fancy that he comes over here on your account?”

“He may do so.”

"You know he does! You have given him encouragement."

"Why should I not?"

"Do you intend to become his wife?"

Mrs. Prince laughed a ringing laugh; and when it had died away, answered:—

"I cannot say that!"

"H'm! I see! Well, my dear, play with him as much as you like; only, don't endanger your own position! Olivia, how many men have you jilted?"

"Not one, Mrs. Calley."

"Eh?"

"If people choose to fall in love with me—or fancy they do so, I cannot help it. I never encourage anybody. I am as discreet as I can well be;—you know that!"

The old lady laughed. "But what about those three people, the lawyer, the parson, and the farmer, who all thought they were going to have you, and did not?"

And then Mrs. Prince, in the best of humours, gave a history of the three luckless men, who, brought within the range of her fascinations, had

fallen instantaneously victims. The little historiettes were most amusing. A lawyer had neglected his profession for her, and all to no purpose. A curate had hoped to win her heart by delivering sermons of thrilling eloquence, and had committed many an ecclesiastical extravagance as well to induce her to regard him with favour. Alas! his eloquence in the pulpit, and his eloquence in her presence, were alike of no avail. A large landed proprietor had followed in their steps. This gentleman, quite in middle life, took it into his head that Mrs. Prince would be a desirable wife; and after dragging himself to flower shows, figuring at county balls, planning archery meetings, and committing himself to other vagaries from which he had before always held aloof, he found that he had been expending his energy to no purpose. At last Mr. Somerton appeared, who was both young and wealthy; and trusting, I suppose, to his youth, and his riches, he hoped to meet with a better fortune than had fallen to his three predecessors.

If there were any ridiculous points in her stories, the incidents or the personages, Olivia

turned them to the best account. She laughingly mimicked her suitors' manner of proposal ; she described their peculiarities of habit and dress ; she sported with them and their hopes charmingly, Mrs. Calley listening with great delight. The old lady rejoiced in the discomfiture of these personages as much as if they had been her personal enemies.

"No, no, Olivia, you mustn't marry any such folks as those. Pray, do comfort me by saying that you won't have anything to do with the last noodle, for you'll never make anything of him? Stay—do you love anyone else?"

"No."

"And never did?"

"I have been married!"

"Tut, tut! that is no answer to my question. Since then—since you have been a widow?"

All at once the happy unconcerned look on Mrs. Prince's face died away ; she became pale, and turned from the quick eyes of Mrs. Calley.

"*My dear, you have loved!* So much for the word of the world, which said that you had not. Who was he?"

"Ask no more!" Mrs. Prince said, rising quickly.

"My dear——" urged the old lady in a kind voice, but one that showed her eagerness to get at the bottom of the secret Olivia was trying to keep from her. "My dear——"

"Not a word more—not a word, if you have any regard for me. Let this matter drop."

And Olivia—her face very pale and her eyes red—sauntered to the window. Mrs. Calley followed her with her sharp orbs. She was silent for a few minutes.

"Am I not to know?" she enquired at last.

"No, no!—don't speak to me on this matter, Mrs. Calley. I have allowed you to guess what I wished nobody to guess. I will satisfy your curiosity in anything else. But on this do not trouble me."

Though Mrs. Calley was a marvellously inquisitive woman, she could forbear indulging this inquisitiveness, at the request of one whom, in her fashion, she regarded affectionately.

With her sharp nose sharper than ever, and

her bright eyes brighter than ever, she said to herself:—

“ She has loved some one I have never seen. What is the secret that makes her so reluctant to speak about him ?”

CHAPTER XII.

A MAN'S PORTRAIT.

FOR the rest of the day Mrs. Prince was rather quieter than usual. Mrs. Calley made two or three attempts to renew the conversation, but failed. Olivia refused to communicate anything further. The next day she had recovered her spirits, and listened to all that Mrs. Calley had to say in reference to Mr. Somerton with her wonted light-heartedness. Whatever sad memory might have been evoked by that one pertinent question of the preceding day, nothing that concerned Mr. Somerton or his hopes seemed to have the power of reviving it again. With a

consideration for the feelings of others, which she rarely shewed, Mrs. Calley, finding that it pained Olivia to be questioned upon that one particular subject of the past, maintained silence; but the old lady watched, and drew her inferences.

"She has loved some one in India," she mused, "and he is either dead—or he has been faithless, or—" and then she conjectured other things. Suddenly it occurred to her, that she might learn what she desired, by applying to Georgine. The sisters probably confided their secrets to each other; and finding Miss Bryant conveniently alone during the day, she went to work with all due caution.

"Ah, my dear, here you are! Have you got a beau to think about, like your sister?"

"No, Mrs. Calley, you know I haven't."

"Time 'll come, my dear, time 'll come. How old are you?"

"Twenty-two!"

"Twenty-two! I thought you wern't so old as that. Then, my dear, you should be on the look out. Though, if I were a man, I

should prefer a well-grown young woman of two or three-and-twenty, to a silly chit of seventeen or eighteen : girls are such ninnies at that age. Now, Georgine, what do you think of Mr. Somerton ?”

“ He’s good enough ; he’s rich.”

“ Exactly—he’s rich. Don’t you think he’s sweet on Olivia ?”

“ I suppose so, though I don’t exactly understand what being sweet on a person may mean.”

“ Don’t you ?—you will, though, some day or other.”

And as Mrs. Calley made this thrilling remark she grinned outrageously, and thought in her innermost soul, that this vain, wilful, pert Georgine would be an exceptionally great fool in this matter.

“ Well, well,” resumed Mrs. Calley, “ we are not all alike, and it’s right we should not be, or Lord knows what would become of us. Mr. Somerton is, I have no doubt, a very good young man. Is your sister much smitten over him ?”

"Oh, dear me! I should say not."

"Never was smitten over anybody, eh? Of course, she tells you her love secrets?"

"Indeed she does not; and, for my part, I don't believe she has any."

"Perhaps not. If she does select Mr. Arthur Somerton, I only hope he'll make her a good husband."

And now having satisfied herself that Georgine had been made no confidante by her sister, in that something which a chance word had brought to her memory, and had caused her to show unaccustomed emotion, Mrs. Calley walked briskly away.

"She hasn't told her sister," she thought, "and she won't tell me. Olivia Prince—careless, light-hearted—has a secret she is either ashamed or afraid to communicate." As she thought thus the old lady knitted her brow and stamped her feet. "No, I hardly think this can be it. She is worldly, but I don't think she would do anything really bad. And yet—perhaps she has more feeling than we give her credit for. Most people think her good-

natured and indifferent. I can penetrate beneath this good nature and indifference, and can see that she is worldly and ambitious. Is there anything behind all this—a true, earnest, loving heart, that nobody knows anything of but herself?”

When she had mused in this somewhat sentimental fashion, she gave the subject up for a time, and condemned herself for prying so much into other people's business,—a condemnation, by-the-way, whose effects were any thing but manifest when the next opportunity offered for indulging her curiosity at the expense of one who felt little disposed to gratify it.

In the evening of that day Mr. Hamperton arrived. It happened that Lester Temple was almost the first to see him. Hamperton met him with his usual unctuous friendliness, and Lester had not been with him long before he became conscious of a singular impression. The solicitor's face recalled the incident at the station, as he was leaving with the Doctor, where he fancied that the stranger's appearance was simi-

lar to that of one whose name he could not at the time recall, and now as he met Mr. Hamperton again, it occurred to him that it was he whom the stranger resembled. He might have made some allusion to this circumstance but for the appearance of some other person, notably Mr. Hamperton's wife, who having been separated from her husband for some weeks, had much cause to show her affectionate interest on his arrival.

"My own Jane," he said tenderly, as the little lady came tremblingly forward, "the pleasure of re-meeting you thus compensates me for all the anguish of absence."

This gallant speech was accompanied by an appropriately ardent embrace. Mrs. Calley was near by during this little sentimental performance, and she grinned, and sneered, and shewed her teeth in an alarming fashion. There were several people to dinner at Mr. Bryant's to-day; Dr. Kealwin, of course, and amongst others, Mr. Arthur Somerton, who watched all Mrs. Prince's movements with very ardent interest. Poor young man! would fate never give him

an opportunity of speaking his mind?—and was this day to pass, as others had done, without his having laid, in ever so small a measure, the foundation of his future happiness? It need scarcely be said that the presence of Mrs. Calley did not materially add to his comfort. She eyed him scornfully; she spoke to him sharply. It was clear to him that she guessed his intentions, and that she by no means approved of them.

Happy destiny gave him Mrs. Prince to take to dinner. He was in ecstasies. His star was propitious at last. All the material particulars of the dinner lost their baser nature—they were æsthetic stepping-stones, leading on to the realization of his desires. They chatted together in the most friendly manner. Hearing scraps of their conversation and their laughter, Mrs. Calley wondered what it all meant. Did Olivia really mean to favour the fair-faced fool at her side? To this old lady's unutterable displeasure it really seemed that she did mean to do so.

The dinner passed over most pleasantly. Mr. Hamperton was especially loquacious and

amusing. It was noticeable that in contributing to the pleasure of the general company, he never forgot to pay especial attention to his wife. Whatever failings this gentleman possessed, he was always careful to observe the amenities of society before her, and thus he won for himself the character of a most estimable husband. During the dinner he descanted upon two subjects. The first was the irresistible charm of domesticity; the second was the extent of his business operations. On both he was equally eloquent.

"Though," he said, "I am immersed in business, I assure you that nobody appreciates a wife's society more than I do. Nobody anticipates more earnestly than myself the fact of a re-meeting with her when business has separated me from her society for the week together. An evening at home, my wife playing the piano, and myself, in an easy chair, reading a novel, has infinitely more attractions for me than a week spent in the prosecution of my duties, important, vast, satisfactory as they are. If I am in Scotland, engaged in matters of tremen-

dous importance, I think every hour of the day of my wife, sitting lonely and sad in Bedford Square. I assure you, pleasure—if I may call it pleasure away from her—and professional avocations, are never so enthralling but that my mind reverts tenderly and readily to the most affectionate little woman a man ever had. Many men profess to consider their business their all, even if they are married—a wife is a secondary consideration to them. It's not so with me. Business holds a subordinate place in my heart: my wife reigns there, supreme !”

“Bravo, Hamperton !” said the Doctor. “I only wish I was a married man, to profit by your eloquence.”

“Now,” resumed Hamperton, “here have I been engaged for six, seven, eight—aye, ten weeks, at places away from my home. When I met Mr. Lester Temple, some weeks ago, I had been busy in France for nearly a month. I had been in nearly all the principal towns of the kingdom. What gave me my greatest satisfaction whilst I was away from my home and my wife? Was it the fact that I

was engaged in transactions, whose importance was transcendent? No. Was it that I received every few days a letter from my wife, whose sympathy and affection encouraged me in my arduous labours, and that I looked forward to the day when I should meet her again? Yes! unhesitatingly, yes! The leisure I had promised myself after that lengthened stay abroad did not come: for I had no sooner been in England again, ere I found it necessary to visit Scotland. Out of that visit grew the business upon which I am engaged some ten or twelve miles from here, in a branch railway running from St. Belchams to Langbourne."

"What is that business?" said Mrs. Calley, sharply.

Nothing taken aback by this remark, which might seem to imply that he was either a boaster or a follower of a trade not strictly legitimate, Mr. Hamperton answered, with great coolness,—

"The contractor of this new railway is negotiating with me for a loan of money. The company are rather in a hurry to complete the line, and that he may not disappoint them, he

found it necessary to increase at once his available finances, and I am the instrument to enable him to do so."

"Not with your own money," were the words on Mrs. Calley's lips ; but for once she curbed her desire to say an unpleasant thing, and spared Mr. Hamperton.

"Mr. Hamperton appears to do an extensive business," remarked Lester, in a low tone of voice, to Mrs. Calley.

"Oh, yes," she said, curtly ; "business—business—that's all he thinks about, in spite of his fine language. His beautiful talk satisfies his wife ; and after his grand preaching he may do what he likes with her for the next six months. Whatever you are, young man, don't be a humbug !"

Doing his best to stifle the laughter which this remark aroused, Lester said,—

"You don't imply that Mr.—Hamperton is——"

"A humbug. He's a humbug. There's Doctor Kealwin — he's another. I don't know which is the greatest, whether he

or my son-in-law. And they know I think so!"

"The branch line we are now making," said Mr. Hamperton, "will be productive of incalculable advantage to Essex. It will place this neighbourhood in communication with all England; farmers, merchants—everybody, in short, will be the sharers in the benefit entailed by it. And what a satisfaction that will be for me to know! Though my name may not figure amongst the directors, and though the county at large may be ignorant of the association of James Hamperton with it, how delightful will it be for me to recall that I, *I*, assisted in the procuring of those advantages, in which all the inhabitants partake! And, by-the-way, talking of this railway puts me in mind of something. One of the engineers was telling me yesterday of an invention of his for signalling trains, which, according to his account, is a material improvement on the old-fashioned method. It will, if approved of, be adopted at St. Belchams junction. As far as I was qualified to judge of its usefulness from his story, I

should say it is an invaluable invention. It has been in use on several continental railways four or five years—the '*Illustrated News*' of 'fifty-nine contains an engraving of it and a full explanation of its principles. The Doctor tells me that you have taken the '*Illustrated*' in from the commencement, Mr. Bryant, so I shall find an account of my friend's invention in this house?"

"Yes," responded Mr. Bryant; "the volumes are in the breakfast-room."

"What year did you say, Mr. Hamperton?" inquired Mrs. Prince.

"Eighteen fifty-nine."

"The year before I left India," she said, carelessly. "I'll get you the volume directly after dinner."

Whilst Mr. Hamperton had been dilating upon the pleasures of domesticity, or throwing out hints as to the magnitude of his monetary operations, Mr. Somerton had been drinking in bliss from Mrs. Prince's eyes, and Mrs. Prince's conversation. I am sorry to say that he was selfish enough to note with a great deal of pleasure

the little emotion she had shown when a remark of Mr. Hamperton caused her carelessly to mention India. Whatever virtues the late Mr. Prince possessed, his widow seemed satisfactorily indifferent to the land where his bones were resting.

In due course the ladies departed. Mr. Somerton and Lester Temple very quickly followed them. On such an occasion as the present Arthur thought that it would be sacrilege to sit drinking port wine. Mr. Hamperton remained longer with Mr. Bryant and Dr. Kealwin. Upon repairing to the drawing-room he found the volume of the "*Illustrated News*" lying on the table. He drank a cup of tea, and turned over the leaves, until he came to the engraving he wished to see.

That and two other engravings, with some letter-press, occupied the page. One of them was a copy of a celebrated picture; the other was the portrait of a gentleman. He would hardly have noticed these, had not the explanation of his friend's invention ran up between them. He made himself master of the details,

and then without shutting the book, put it away from him.

At that moment Mrs. Prince came to his side, to take his cup.

"Won't you have some more tea, Mr. Hamperton?" she inquired.

In saying this her eye fell upon the page of the open volume. She was taking Mr. Hamperton's cup, and her hand shook as she did so.

"I like to combine business with pleasure," he said; "I have made myself *au fait* in that signalling machine, and I have been enjoying your most excellent tea and your laughter."

Olivia Prince made no response but walked away with his cup, returning with it the next minute. She again fixed her eyes wistfully upon the open book; and happening to glance up, to take his cup from her hands, Mr. Hamperton saw evidences of emotion on her face, and noticed that she was looking towards the portrait. He took his tea and drank it. A few minutes afterwards, leaving the book still open, he arose and joined Dr. Kealwin. As he was talking

with him, he remarked that Mrs. Prince was not at her ease, and that she kept glancing again and again from her seat to the book, as if eager to look again at the portrait, which had so much disturbed her. As soon as she could conveniently leave the side of Arthur Somerton, she arose and went to the table on which the book was lying.

Mr. Hamperton saw her draw it towards her, and look fixedly at the portrait as though she recognised it. Then she seemed to read the history with which it was accompanied. She was very pale, and her hands, as Mr. Hamperton's observation assured him, trembled between the leaves. Suddenly she arose; passed quickly across the room; and disappeared by one of the windows.

"What is the history of that portrait?" thought Mr. Hamperton, walking to the place which she had just vacated.

He looked at it intently. It was that of a man four or five and thirty years of age—grave, intelligent, gentlemanly. Beneath the portrait was the name, "Albert Egerton Crossley."

According to the biographical account he was a Major in the Indian Army, and had distinguished himself conspicuously in quelling some outbreak amongst the natives, which outbreak, but for his promptness and skill, had threatened to end in very serious consequences. Albert Egerton Crossley was not only distinguished as a soldier of rare efficiency, but as a man and a Christian, by whose efforts, the moral and intellectual condition of the rank and file of his regiment had been materially heightened. His age, the engagements in which he had taken a part, and some minor details of his life, completed the biographical account of one, whose portrait, accidentally discovered, had caused Mrs. Prince to shew such great and unaccustomed emotion.

Mr. Hamperton was a man who never forgot a face, when once seen ; but he took especial care to fix the features of this accurately on his memory, that he should not forget it, in case chance threw him in the way of its living representative.

“Olivia Prince has loved this man,” he

said ; and with this reflection, he shut the book, arose and walked to the window, through which she had passed to the garden.

“What a night !” he remarked. “If I were not a married man, that beautiful moon would make me love-sick !”

These observations were addressed to the Doctor. Very shortly afterwards he slipped out unobserved by the rest, for Georgine was playing the piano, and the others were listening to her, with the exception of Mr. Somerton, who attributed Mrs. Prince’s disappearance to the heat of the room, and not having the courage to follow her into the garden, was consequently the victim of unutterable torture.

To Mr. Hamperton, Olivia’s tell-tale white dress betrayed her, sitting on one of the iron garden seats, behind a mass of shrubbery. He walked softly thither, and stopped when he could command her face without being seen. It was very pale, and the tears were falling down it. She spoke no word, but looked sorrowfully forward. This was the woman who, a few minutes since, was throwing her fascinations

around Arthur Somerton ! This was the woman, who, friends and enemies alike said, had never loved, and who passed from lover to lover, with delightful unconcernedness !

What would inquisitive Mrs. Calley not have given to have been a witness of this scene, which Mr. Hamperton had stumbled on so opportunely ?

That gentleman, his curiosity fully satisfied, returned to the drawing room.

During the evening it pleased Mrs. Calley to give a great deal of her attention to Lester. He became a sudden favourite of the old lady. She soon obtained all the particulars of his life, and seemed surprised when she heard that his introduction to Mr. Bryant's family was the result of Doctor Kealwin's kind interest in him. The Doctor and she had never agreed, or rather she had professed to disbelieve all that his admirers said of him. All her views respecting this polite and kindly gentleman, she communicated to Lester, and surprised him by the sharpness and vigour of her remarks.

"I was never wrong in judging a man yet, and I know I'm not wrong about Kealwin. He *is*, or *has been* what we do not see. And then there's that Hamperton, too;" (this was said, as he reappeared), "he's another popular delusion. His wife believes in him—poor thing; but I never did, and I never shall. Ah! young man, I see you stare. I'm older than you, and have seen a good deal more of the world. Perhaps you'll find out one day that what I've said about these two people is right. And now, sir, tell me what you think of the ladies here!"

"Mrs. Prince is a charming woman; and Georgine, that is Miss Bryant, is very beautiful!"

Mrs. Calley fixed her eyes upon Lester, and read his thoughts. Her keen glance was full of enquiry. It was vain for him to deny anything or attempt to do so before this sharp-sighted old woman. A look, a word, a whisper,—even silence was enough for her. She could build a whole logical edifice on a trifle, and accomplish her work so firmly, that it would require a skilful man, indeed, to upset it.

"Be careful, young man. Georgine won't marry a man with less than a thousand a year to begin with! And not to blame either! You haven't that, I suppose!" Mrs. Calley might have given some more equally pleasant advice, but there was a movement for whist, and this was a game in which she found especial delight.

"Now, Hamperton," said the Doctor, "Mrs. Calley wants you for a partner."

"You know I don't give you credit for much good, Mr. Hamperton," answered the old lady, "but I do for a fine game of whist."

"Where's Olivia?" asked Mr. Bryant. In a few moments she stepped into the room, looking very pale. "Mr. Somerton wants a partner—will you be it?" enquired her sister.

"Yes;" she answered, rather wearily. She placed herself opposite Arthur, and the play began.

All during the game Olivia's thoughts were far away from the green table. That eastern home, of which she used to talk so lightly, rose in her memory, and scenes, incidents, people, and words, which she had allowed to slip from

her mind, came surging up in it again. So occupied, it was not wonderful that she played very indifferently, nor that her partner, Arthur Somerton, seeing her pale face, which, of course, he attributed to headache, played as unsatisfactorily. The consequence was that Mr. Hamperton and Mrs. Calley won every game.

The latter was a lady who never allowed her special friendship to regulate the monetary transactions which might arise after a rubber or two of whist, and when Olivia handed her over three or four half-crowns she pocketed them with due pleasure. "Ah! my dear!" she said, "you've got a head-ache. People should never play whist when they are unwell; they are sure to lose."

And this was all the sympathy Mrs. Calley gave her favourite. But the old lady, absorbingly engaged as she seemed to be in the game, had been thinking of other things as well. She remarked the alteration in Mrs. Prince's manner to Arthur Somerton—how insignificant the attention was that she gave him in the drawing-room. She tried to get a few words with her,

when the party broke up for the evening, but Olivia was hasty with her, and Mrs. Calley had to retire dissatisfied. Mrs. Prince, just as she was about to go up-stairs, turned back, and went into the drawing-room again. The fire was nearly out, the lights were extinguished, and the room was chill. Slightly shivering, she went to the table, where the volume was still lying, and opened it again at the portrait. The faint light of the bed-room candle made her face, as she bent eagerly over the book, seem ghastly and wan.

She stood there some minutes, and then sighing heavily, left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

DR. KEALWIN AT HOME.

HALF past six o'clock the next day, Dr. Kealwin and his friend, Mr. James Hamperton were sitting over their wine, in the very snug dining-room of the Doctor's house.

Kealwin, lying back at one end of the table, in a chair which he had devised for his especial comfort, sipped his port patiently, but with a quiet gusto, suggestive of the wine's good quality and the drinker's exquisite taste. The solicitor, at the other end of the table, smacked his lips rather loudly, and was more demonstrative in his manner of showing that he appre-

ciated the vintage,—slapping his thigh, and tossing his head back, as he exclaimed :—

“ By Jove, Kealwin, I’ve not tasted such good wine as this for years, and I boast myself upon having some first-rate specimens in my cellar.”

“ Yes,” said the Doctor, with quiet unctuousness ; “ it has been in bottle thirty-eight years. I didn’t buy it. It came out of my brother’s cellar.”

“ Lucky dog, you, to come in for your brother’s property, and your brother’s wine.”

“ I have been lucky, I suppose,” remarked the other, in that tone of self-satisfaction which was so common to him. “ I have been lucky.”

“ More so than the rest of us. But, with your property, I wonder you never married !”

“ Married !” and Kealwin raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

“ Yes, married ! I wonder you don’t marry, now ! There’s Miss Bryant, and there’s her sister !”

“ Her sister ! *Ma foi !* if I shewed any

tenderness for Olivia Prince, she'd serve me as I expect she'll serve young Somerton!"

"A jilt? She's played with a good many, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! It's an amusement for her."

"She's a splendid woman!" remarked Hamperton, enthusiastically; "though, but for what I witnessed last night, I should fancy not the kind of woman to conceive a very passionate attachment to any one."

"Eh? From what you witnessed last night. Surely no indications of a special preference for that good-natured ninny, young Somerton!"

"No! No! No! This between ourselves." And then James Hamperton communicated to the doctor the incident of the previous night.

"Some Indian lover, I've no doubt," said Kealwin, carelessly. "I suppose the most worldly-minded woman has a weak spot somewhere, and perhaps this soldier discovered Mrs. Prince's. Well . . ." Then the doctor cracked a nut, and sipped his wine again. He was too much of an egotist to trouble himself greatly about the romances of other people; and with

this nut, and this sip of wine, he dismissed Mrs. Prince's Indian romance from his memory.

George Dampier Kealwin was one of those wonderfully lucky men who occasionally appear on the earth to the great envy of persons less fortunately situated. During the few years which he practised as a physician, he was very successful. Then his father died, leaving him a comfortable independency. Then his sister—another little fortune; and at last, his elder brother, who, dying without wife or child, bequeathed him the family estate. Before the doctor was five-and-thirty, he was a very wealthy man. Until he was forty-five he lived in London—at least he called London his home, but he was stationary nowhere—wandering hither and thither wherever his fancy might lead him. He lived a wealthy bachelor's life, and having an immense capacity for enjoyment, he had, at least, his share of it. To the astonishment of his friends, the possession of great wealth seemed never to tempt him to marry, though the gay, handsome doctor would surely have had little

difficulty in finding a wife. He was a genial man ; but though fond of pleasure, he was the last to give way to excess. Nature had bestowed on him a magnificent constitution. He was a medical man, and knew the value of a good constitution, and never abused it. The choicest wines that could be procured graced his table—the wholesomest and best cooked food composed his diet. He was too wise a man to endanger his digestion by an indifferent *cuisine*. Late hours he systematically avoided. From his boyhood he had taken robust exercise ; and all his life long he had been a diligent, though not a fagging reader. The consequence was, that, past middle life, his health and spirits were as glorious as those of a lad of eighteen. I fear his existence had been something of a Pagan's ; but it had been an enjoyable one, and he saw no reason to fear that the future would be more clouded than the past.

At forty-six—either a little tired of his wanderings, or desirous of enjoying a new phase of life—he determined upon living at Messingham, and building a house there. He ascertained

that it was the healthiest village in Essex—the deaths per year in Messingham being at a minimum. No spot could suit the wealthy epicurean better, for it was as picturesque as it was healthy. He was his own architect, and built a house which was by all pronounced a gem. His taste was exquisite, and was as conspicuous in the appointments of the residence, as in its architecture. The place was stocked with curious and valuable antique cabinets. In the library were books of all kinds—books old, curious, quaint, picturesque, and of general literature. Dr. Kealwin never allowed a collection to come to the hammer without securing the pick of it. The china in the house was priceless. Articles of *vertu* abounded in every room. Nothing was too choice for his fancy : nothing seemed too costly for his pocket. The glass, the dinner, and the tea services, the plate—all bespoke the same exquisite taste. In the cellar were wines which for quality, at least, scarcely a prince in Europe could rival—wines of the best vintages, and the best brands. Altogether, the house was the house of an intellectual epicurean ; and Dr.

Kealwin, reclining backward in his chair, and sipping his port, looked that intellectual epicurean to perfection.

“By Jove,” said Hamperton, “what a time it is since we two were sitting together and enjoying ourselves. It seems wonderfully like old times this. Ah! The fates ordained a business, energetic life for me, and for you ease and port wine every day. We’ve known each other a good many years, Kealwin!”

“You were a better looking man when I first knew you than you are now,” was the Doctor’s response.

“Possibly! I won’t return the compliment. I may be a little battered. As for you, the years pass over your head without touching it. Do you ever think of the old days, Kealwin?”

“Lord! yes—the pleasant ones.”

“I should fancy you hadn’t many very unpleasant ones. You’ve always had the game in your hands.”

“Well, I don’t complain of my luck.” And he raised his glass to his lips again, and took a

long sip. What an easy, joyous look there was on his face as he bent back in his chair, after having set the glass down! Yes—the game had always been in his hands; and he appeared so wondrously comfortable, that you couldn't help thinking the game would keep in his hands until the end—the end, by the way, which seemed a long way off from the contented, healthy doctor!

“Let me see,” said Hamperton; “there was some talk of your admiring that little French girl—Cecile Marescôt—wasn't there—years ago?”

At this question, Kealwin was putting his hand forward to take up his glass again, but the hand halted a little before he replied—

“No, was there?” he said, quietly.

“I always fancied so. At least your name was often, in my hearing, associated with hers!”

“People did say stupid things, I daresay, about us!”

“Well—she was a lovely girl. She's dead, isn't she?”

“I—I think so!”

The Doctor's face had lost a little of its wonted composure; and the rays of the setting sun,

coming in through the window, and falling on it, gave it a strange look. As Mr. Hamperton's eyes happened to be fixed on his plate, he failed to see it, and went on unconscious that the Doctor showed any unwonted emotion.

"Cecile was the girl that my poor brother was so fond of," said Hamperton.

"Was he!" said the Doctor, abstractedly. "Ah—have you heard of him lately?" he asked.

And now it was Mr. Hamperton's face that fell.

"The last I heard about him was two years ago—that he was dead!"

Kealwin sighed, as if he had been thinking rather intently. His friend was silent. For some minutes these two never spoke. The light which had been flashing on the decanters, and making the bright wine more bright, died gradually away. A grey hue settled on the room, and the faces of these two men, whose memories had gone back to some unpleasant history in the past, were invisible to each other.

"I'll ring the bell for lights," said the

Doctor, starting up. "And we'll have another bottle of port."

In a few minutes more the room was bright with freshly lighted candles: another decanter of port stood on the table: Dr. Kealwin had recovered his generally composed and self-satisfied look: Hamperton had started another theme, his tongue running on glibly enough.

"I wonder," he said, "that you don't vary the monotony of your existence with the excitement of a little speculation. You eat, drink, walk, read, and sleep—that's all you do. Take my advice. Invest—a thousand or two. I assure you, you'll enjoy yourself marvellously in watching the fluctuation of the markets!"

"My good fellow, don't talk nonsense," said Kealwin; "it's all very well for people who have nothing to speculate, but I fail to see what benefit those who are well off derive by speculation. No, no, it's all very fine for you to preach."

"I wish I could persuade you to take fifty shares in the Phosphoro-Locomotive Company."

“Wheugh! what the deuce is that?”

“Not heard of that splendid invention! Ah, living in the country, you know nothing of what’s going on in the world. Well, this company is started to supply railways with engines, the motive power of which is phosphorus! At present the invention is a secret, save to a few; but I can assure you it is destined to change the whole economy of railways. This invention is less costly by two-thirds than the steam-engine, while the rate of speed attainable by it will be double that now common on the fastest lines.”

“Oh, an advantage, truly; but I suppose the company is a life insurance company as well?”

“Eh,—why?”

“Because at your rate of travelling the risk of life will be something awful.”

“Bah, Kealwin! you’re a Conservative in all your notions.”

“Yes, I am, where my life is concerned.”

“Then you won’t have anything to do with the Phosphoro-Locomotive Company?”

"No ; I'll see how it works. If the invention should succeed, I may take a few shares."

"Success !—and success is certain,—will put the shares up in a week to a premium."

"Then I'll buy 'em all," said the Doctor. "At present I'm afraid your grand invention must be given to the world without any assistance for me."

"Do you care anything about joint stock banks?" asked Hamperton.

"I should if I'd got a running account in them."

"I mean, don't you care to invest in them? I'll guarantee you thirty-five per cent. for shares in one I am now starting!"

"You're generous, certainly. But the bank mightn't stand after it had been open a year."

"Ah, your Conservative spirit colours everything. I thought better of you at one time, Kealwin. The country has spoiled you. But come, listen to me—take some shares in the 'General Banking Company,' Limited. Joint stock banks are the great facts of the age. A

man who isn't a shareholder in one, or a director of one, is nobody."

"Then I'm nobody, my dear Hamperton, and I'm afraid I shall be nobody for a long time to come," was the Doctor's delightfully cool answer.

"Sorry to hear you say so. Well, then, let me put your name down as director to the 'Universal Hotel Company,' (Limited, of course). That'll make the fortune of every shareholder."

"Universal Hotel Company!" said Kealwin; "I suppose you intend to knock down St. Paul's, and build your hotel there. Fine idea this! By universal, you mean, of course, that your establishment shall be a home for people of every tongue and every clime, with nigger waiters for the black ambassadors of the King of Dahomey, Esquimaux servants for the Esquimaux travellers who may favour your hotel, and Cossacks for gentlemen from the Don! Every language under the sun spoken—obscure dialects as well; oil and grease for the Laps., birds' nests for the Chinese, beef for the Briton,

and porridge for the Scotchman! I wish your enterprise every success."

"You don't understand it. The company only proposes to build hotels in the chief cities of the world. The magnitude of its operations, while guaranteeing splendid interest for the shareholders, will render much of the ordinary hotel machinery, now so dear, comparatively cheap. So admirable are the plans already drawn up for working this splendid scheme, that the expenses will be reduced to a minimum."

"Especially if you have your Phosphoro- Locomotive engines running between your hotels, to carry hot joints from Paris to St. Petersburg!"

"You may laugh, Kealwin, but I maintain the plan is magnificent, and will amply repay those who are wise enough to invest in it. If you won't have anything to do with the hotel, what say you to a mine?"

"A mine!—what, do you dabble in mines too?"

"The commercial enterprises," said Hamper-ton, solemnly, "with which I have to do are vast and various."

"So it seems."

"Try a mine! There's a mine which will shortly be opened on a gentleman's estate in Munster, and it is believed that it will yield gold equal, if not superior, to the choicest Californian."

"Gold in Ireland! hurrah! When Paddy staggers home to his hovel with his nuggets on his shoulder, the emancipation of Ireland is not far off. Rejoice, O spirits of Daniel O'Connell and Smith O'Brien! The freedom of your beloved isle is at hand! Hamperton, I'm an Englishman, but not selfish; I won't envy Paddy his chance; let him have his nuggets, I won't have anything to do with a speculation which is essentially an Irishman's. Pass the bottle, Hamperton; you've been talking and forgetting to drink. After this last grand enterprise of yours, I want support."

"I don't despair yet of making you take shares in a profitable enterprise," said the sanguine Hamperton.

"I am glad you are so hopeful; but I can assure you that all your eloquence in favour of

your various companies is wasted upon me. You may, if you like, call me a Conservative ; perhaps I am one. My property lies in land, in houses, in good substantial mortgages, and in the funds. Shouldn't I be an ass to transfer any of it, so secured, to the ventures you have named, excellent as some of them may be? Confess, now."

"You hold such old-fashioned views about property," responded Hamperton, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Old-fashioned they may be, but they are respectable. No, my friend, I am not a man exactly after your fashion—I don't take extensive views of life. Your grand soul, I have no doubt, derives immense satisfaction from contemplating the great good which will accrue to the people from your various schemes—Hotels, Railways, Phosphorus Engines, and Joint Stock Banking Companies, and you don't grumble much if your pocket is occasionally empty. My soul is in no wise so generous. I have a good property ; it is well laid out, and I don't care to disturb it. If you preached until to-morrow

morning, I should still be of the same mind. You must endeavour to find some less selfish person than I am to invest in your companies. There's Bryant—try him. I believe he has some loose cash, which might, perhaps, be profitably spent in setting one of your engines going."

"I'm sorry you are so blind to your interest, Kealwin. Well, I suppose I can't oblige an old friend. Stay—have you made your will?"

"No; and don't intend to for some years."

"Kealwin!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"You are most unwise. At your age everybody ought to have made his will. *I have.*"

"I hope your friends will be satisfied with it," said Kealwin, slyly.

"Perfectly. And you mean to tell me that you have neglected so plain a duty? Pray think of the matter."

The Doctor burst out laughing.

"Come, come, that's good. I'm in perfect health, not a pain anywhere. I'm a doctor, and

know there's nothing amiss with me; why, therefore, should I make a will?"

"You can't account for accidents."

"True, true; but as I'm a countryman, I sha'n't trust myself in a train dragged by one of your phosphoro-locomotive engines! My life isn't exposed to many risks."

"You may be run over—your house may be burnt up—or you may be murdered."

"Murdered!" cried Kealwin, laughing. "Do you always run over this lugubrious list of casualties when you are persuading any of your clients to make his will?"

"I put all the risks to which everybody is exposed in the proper light. Come, again—make your will, or, rather, dictate to me its particulars, and let me have the pleasure of drawing up the deed."

"By Jove, Hamperton, you are a kind chap. Failing to involve me in your speculating schemes, you must do something suggestive of my death. Very considerate of you—very. At present, at any rate, I can't make my will, for

I've not decided upon those whom I should like to benefit by it."

"Robert Evershed, of Langbourne, is your nearest relative, isn't he?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say he is—I always hated the Eversheds; and I believe Robert's about the only relative I have in the world. It is small satisfaction that of making a will, and leaving your money to one for whom you have little regard."

"But you don't know much of Robert. If you were better acquainted with him, you might like him better."

"I haven't seen him since he was a lad."

"Ask him over, and see what he is like now. You may take a fancy to him, and afterwards make your will in his favour with the greatest satisfaction!"

"I'm afraid I can't give you the pleasure of drawing that document up yet, Hamperton. The making of it would be such a farce. In all probability I shall live five-and-twenty or thirty years longer; I was never seriously ill in my life. I'm sound from top-to-toe. If I made

my will in favour of young Evershed, and he knew of it, it would be rather galling for him to be tolerably certain that my life would be prolonged until he was more than a middle-aged man."

"Well—well! Still you ought to make your will; and Robert Evershed share in the benefit."

And then Mr. Hamperton brought forward every argument which he thought might tell. When a man's will was made, his mind was at ease, his conscience was at rest. And if a person wished for some selfish gratification he might thus easily obtain it. So long as our humble friends have some proper recognition at our death, why should we trouble ourselves by bestowing upon them anything while we are alive? Kealwin chuckled wonderfully as he heard this view of the case; and unlike a good many other persons whose conduct seems often to be governed by such a consideration, he did not consent to be moved by it.

Hamperton spoke in especially high terms of Robert Evershed, and insisted that he ought

more than any one else, to derive benefit from the Doctor.

"I won't make my will, Hamperton," said Kealwin, "but I'll invite Evershed over here; and see what I think of him. I know he can expect nothing from me, and so he won't be disappointed if this visit ends in nothing."

"Glad I have got you to consent to something," cried Hamperton, "and now let us go back to our speculations."

Doctor Kealwin burst out laughing.

"Speculations! Ha! ha! I fear if I invest in your companies, my heir will come poorly off in the end."

"You are incorrigible," replied Hamperton. But he said nothing more about his speculations that evening; and the remainder of the bottle was discussed with some light and pleasant chat.

The next day a note was despatched to Robert Evershed, inviting him to stay a few days with his kinsman, Doctor Kealwin.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROBERT EVERSLED FINDS FAVOUR IN MRS. CALLEY'S EYES.

VERY much to the annoyance of Mrs. Calley, Mr. Arthur Somerton rode over to the Priory every day or two, and contrived to spend a good many hours in the society of Olivia Prince. It was very evident that the poor young gentleman was infatuated by the widow ; and though it was less evident that she reciprocated his regard with corresponding ardour, it seemed in no wise improbable that she would grant him the favour which he coveted so eagerly, but for which he had not yet mustered up courage to ask. She was exceedingly gracious to him ;

and she listened to his conversation with apparent pleasure, though it was characterized by no especial brilliancy. She was careful to play selections of music for which she knew he had a partiality—waltzes, and epileptic fantasias—and to these Mr. Arthur Somerton listened with intense satisfaction. He was incapable of appreciating the productions of any great masters, and Olivia was careful not to weary his ears with them.

Mrs. Calley witnessed all this with great disgust. Her favourite was throwing herself away ; and she could not convince her of the sacrifice she was making. Mindful of Olivia's emotion upon a certain stray question, and finding that other advice was unheeded, the old lady re-opened a very painful subject—discreetly. Olivia listened with patience for a few minutes—her face a little paler than usual, and her lips firmly knit ; then she said, with an emphasis, which her friend could not fail to understand :—

“ No more of this, Mrs. Calley, I can be very obstinate if I choose ; and if you try to prevent my marrying Arthur Somerton by allusion to a

subject, whose painfulness, *you* cannot comprehend, I am not unlikely to do the very thing you would be sorry to see me do—in despite !”

“ And am I, not to know what this subject is ?”

“ No.”

“ Olivia.”

“ No. I am determined in what I say.”

Mrs. Calley was fain to be content ; but she scowled at Olivia. “ If you will make yourself a fool with this Arthur Somerton, you’ve nobody to blame but yourself. He’s an empty headed noodle !”

“ Probably. But he’s rich ! Remember your own teaching ! You were kind enough to select my first husband for me, because he was a man of position, and promised to be a man of wealth. I accepted him at your hands without complaining. Pray, allow me, to select one—I don’t say I *shall* select Mr. Somerton,—one who at least enjoys two of the conditions, you deem essential in a husband,—riches and a governable spirit.”

So answered, Mrs. Calley could make no

remark. Scarcely had Olivia spoken before a horse's foot was heard without; and looking up, she saw Mr. Somerton approaching the house. Mrs. Calley saw him too.

"I'll go;" she said, "accept the noodle if you like him. I won't prevent you."

She took an angry and abrupt departure; and the chair she had been sitting upon was soon afterwards occupied by Mr. Somerton, whose face was very hot and red, with riding, and with the emotion of a nervous but ardent lover.

"What lovely weather we get," said he, after he had shaken hands with Mrs. Prince. This was not an extraordinary remark on his part: but it was, perhaps, as much as could be expected under the circumstances.

"Lovely, indeed! I do so much like the summer. You had a good game of cricket the other day, I hear?"

"Yes, I thought you would have been one of the spectators of the match," remarked Mr. Somerton; and here his right hand strayed across a small table towards that of Mrs. Prince's, which she suddenly withdrew.

"I intended to have been. But the day threatened to be wet, and I had not the courage to face it!"

"I did so hope you would have been there," said Arthur Somerton fervently. His eyes met those of Olivia. His were eloquent of his inner meaning: hers were only frank and laughing.

"I suppose you were playing your best then," she said.

Indeed Mr. Somerton had been playing his best; and he had been doing so on Olivia's particular account. It was rather galling, therefore, that she had not been present to witness his skill. Furthermore, Mr. Somerton had of late been sharpening up his accomplishments with an especial eye to winning the favour of Mrs. Prince. Being a gentleman of good property, it was unnecessary for him to enter the lists in the matter of accomplishments with such people as Lester Temple—the various talents of the latter gentleman being, in the estimation of Arthur Somerton, those of a "professional," who, in order to obtain the regard of society, must keep his wits sharpened to the keenest. Mr. Somerton was a large

landed proprietor, and could gain a footing anywhere on the strength of his being so. He need not play the piano, or sing, or draw, or talk Italian, or German. So long as he could hunt well, and shoot well, and dance well, and cricket well, and embellish his conversation with a scrap of Latin quotation, and a classical allusion—eloquent of Harrow and Oxford—this was enough for him.

Twice or thrice lately he had been disappointed in the declaration of his hopes. Undaunted by past unsuccesses, he was resolved to cross the Rubicon, on that very day, when Mrs. Calley angrily left the room on account of his arrival. He had rehearsed various formulæ of proposals. In the matter of offers, he had reviewed the passionate, the despairing, the common-place, the matter of business, and the tender.

But though he had cogitated so profoundly as he rode from Ashley Hall to the Priory upon the various methods of giving definite expression to his hopes, he had not fixed upon the one he should employ. Time and opportunity must settle this. Upon one thing he was resolved—

that the matter should be got through that day.

"We have been improving the Hall, building a new wing, and a fresh conservatory!" remarked Mr. Somerton.

"Ah! Then it will look very nice. But the place was nice before, and didn't stand in need of such improvements!"

"Perhaps—but——" And here he was on the point of saying that Ashley Hall was in many respects old-fashioned, and that he should not like to take a wife there until it had been modernised in accordance with the times.

"You must come over and see the improvements," he said, "and tell me how you like them!"

Nearer and nearer. Yes—he was indeed approaching the awful leap. Assist him, Heaven, and get him through this difficulty!

"You have such good taste yourself, Mr. Somerton," remarked Mrs. Prince; "and my approval can be of little value."

"It can—indeed it can," responded Arthur, glowing. "I should value your approval more

than that of any one—I assure you, more than that of any one !”

And here he was getting very nervous ; and looked wistfully towards the door, fearful that somebody might come in before the fatal words were spoken. To his great satisfaction the door remained still. However, unseen by him, as his heart palpitated, and his ears sung, a gentleman during this colloquy had been approaching the house ; and as he made that remark upon the great value he placed upon the opinion of Mrs. Prince, this gentleman rapped. Fortunately Arthur at that moment was as deaf as he was blind, and the advent of a visitor was unsuspected by him. Not so by Mrs. Prince, who was less absorbed in the little drama now being played.

“ I—I assure you,” he stammered, “ that I shall be glad to have your approval of what I have done at the Hall. Can—can you not guess why ?”

He had been hot when he entered the room, but he was hotter now ; and again and again his sweetly-scented handkerchief was raised and dabbed over his very heated brow.

"Can—can you not guess why?" he stammered again.

"Because as you've said you attribute to me very good taste?"

Mr. Somerton was a little taken aback by this business-like remark. He had expected a blush—anything but this common-place reply.

"No—no—that is not exactly. Because—because—" He trembled, stammered, blushed, seized his hair, his whiskers, his pocket handkerchief.

And then but for an interruption, he would have gone on his knees, or otherwise committed himself in his amorous ardour. The door, however, was opened; and the voice of the servant heard announcing the name of—

"Mr. Robert Evershed!"

Robert bowed, and advanced towards Mrs. Prince: she arose: Arthur Somerton looked very awkward and very angry, and saw that all hopes were again up for the day.

"I have called to see an old friend of mine," said Robert—"Lester Temple."

"I've heard him mention you," answered Mrs.

Prince, who was not unrelieved by this opportune appearance of Robert Evershed, for she had not made up her mind as to the answer she should make Mr. Somerton.

"I arrived this morning at Dr. Kealwin's," said Robert; "and as Lester is an old friend of mine, I wished to see him as soon as possible!"

"I'll ring the bell, and tell the servant to inform Mr. Temple of your visit;" and as Mrs. Prince said this she rang the bell. The servant appeared: was told her message: and went away.

"Do you make a long stay with the Doctor?" asked Olivia.

"Only a few days. I cannot leave Langbourne for long!"

Gnawing his moustache, Arthur bothered his brains as to whom this person could be. Evershed! Yes. He had heard the name. It was a good one; but the family, he had the intense satisfaction of knowing, had been going down lately—money being less plentiful in the hands of the Eversheds than formerly, and decadence generally being associated with the name. Having comforted himself with these unselfish re-

flections, Mr. Somerton disabused his mind of any fear that he might find a rival in the affections of Mrs. Prince, on this determined-looking, broad-shouldered young man's part. It might not be flattering to the lady to believe that she would not marry a poor man ; but Arthur had this conviction.

Lester Temple was not long before he made his appearance. And he had not been in the room many minutes before Mrs. Calley herself appeared.

"And so, you're an Evershed," said she, breaking in upon the chat of Robert and Lester Temple.

"My name is Evershed," responded the gentleman so addressed.

"Ah ! I knew your father and your grandfather. You are like them both, certainly, but the likeness is not striking." And she fixed her dark, quick eyes upon him, as if she were making a mental inventory of every feature. The result of her keen observation seemed to please her ; but the look of gratification which had come upon her face died away when she turned

in the direction of Mr. Somerton. Mrs. Calley—curious old woman—had upon her first introduction taken a violent dislike to the wealthy owner of Ashley Hall, and she had as rapidly conceived a favourable opinion of the last representative of the Eversheds, who had undertaken the somewhat difficult task of raising the family banner out of the dust.

Mr. Bryant coming into the room soon after the arrival of Robert, asked him to stay to dinner. Mr. Bryant had seen the Doctor, and Kealwin had promised to dine with him. He was fain to ask Mr. Somerton as well.

On the first opportunity, Mrs. Calley put a series of questions to Lester Temple, relative to his friend. She knew that Evershed had a good name, and that he was the nearest relative of the wealthy Doctor Kealwin. Though the family had been less prosperous of late years than it had once been, it was one which, for marriageable reasons, was not uninviting, and she knew no cause why its former consequence should not be regained. Though Mrs. Calley's ideal of life was not a very high one, she could

not withhold her admiration from the purpose which Evershed had set before him—the retrieving of the family name and consequence, with the observance of a self-denial on his part which few men of his years would have had the courage to undertake. When she heard that the self-denial rendered marriage impossible, she grinned musingly, confessed that it was all very well, but believed that all his intentions in this matter would come to nothing. Lester made no reference to Sibylla Proby; and therefore Mrs. Calley was well satisfied with what the tutor had told her.

Of the real hardness of Robert Evershed's task she had no comprehension; and, save in the matter of wealth, she saw in him every qualification that rendered him fit to occupy the place which Arthur Somerton was so desirous of filling.

With her opinions it was especially gratifying to her to notice that Robert paid Olivia Prince particular attention, and that she was evidently pleased with it. He was more companionable than Mr. Somerton, who for the rest of the day

passed a somewhat unsatisfactory existence—much to the delight of Mrs. Calley, an interested witness of his woes. She watched him and laughed to herself at his discomfiture. If she ever saw that he was eager to get to Mrs. Prince, she was careful to retain him at her side, or to dispatch him on a message. Her inventive talents were especially active; and the manœuvres she contrived for keeping Arthur Somerton and Mrs. Prince apart were surpassingly ingenious. Similarly were the manœuvres she contrived for keeping Robert Evershed and Mrs. Prince together.

Late that night, when Mr. Somerton, Dr. Kealwin, and Robert Evershed, had taken their departure, and the inmates of the Priory had retired to rest, Mrs. Calley, before going to her room, entered that of Mrs. Prince, and had a chat with her.

“Heigho!” said Olivia; “this seems to have been a pleasant day.”

And she lay back in an easy chair before her toilette table.

“You’ve enjoyed it, have you? I thought so. What do you think of Mr. Evershed?”

"He's a gentlemanly, shrewd, decisive——"

"He's something superior to Mr. Somerton," added Mrs. Calley, quickly.

"In personal qualifications--yes, certainly."

"My dear, what would you think of him for a husband?"

Olivia smiled, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Give over Arthur Somerton, and encourage this Robert Evershed. Though he'll never be so rich as the other, he's worth something, and the other is not."

Olivia yawned, and only said—

"I'm sleepy!"

"He's Dr. Kealwin's only relative, and when the Doctor dies—I wish he'd die to-morrow—he'll have the greater part of his money!"

Once more Mrs. Prince yawned.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Calley; "I won't keep you out of your bed. Think over what I've said. Have nothing to do with Mr. Somerton; and perhaps I shall so manage that Robert Evershed shall soon be a richer man than he expects."

And then she took her departure, leaving

Olivia to her meditations, and her undressing. But the former were not very absorbing in their nature, and she slept, and dreamed of neither Arthur Somerton, nor of Robert Evershed.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. CALLEY'S NEGOCIATIONS.

IT was generally understood that Dr. Kealwin had invited Robert Evershed to stay with him for very particular motives, though there was some surprise that he should thus suddenly notice a kinsman, whom he had hitherto seemed entirely to ignore. The relationship between Kealwin and the Eversheds was not close; their intimacy had never been great, and the Doctor, for some reason, had never cared very much for the only connections he had. When, therefore, Robert was known to be staying at his friend's house, it was natural that an im-

pression should get abroad that the Doctor was anxious to forget the old disfavour with which he regarded the Eversheds, and to have some intimacy with the person whom he purposed to receive the recognition, to which relationship and circumstances constituted a claim. As for Robert Evershed himself, he never for a moment indulged a hope that this visit would result in any benefit to him. He had no faith in the Doctor's friendship, and believed that the invitation was dictated by ordinary courtesy only. His visit had not lasted long before his views were confirmed. Kealwin showed him the kindness of a gentlemanly host; but never for a moment referred, save in the most common-place terms, to their relationship. Indeed, he seemed to make light of the distant cousinship; and more than once a thought entered Robert's head, that he had been invited to Kealwin's in order that any hopes of benefiting by the rich Doctor's death might be disabused, and that he might the more easily reconcile himself to the hard tenor of his way. As he was wise enough to come without hope, he was fortunate enough to leave without disappointment.

The week he passed with the Doctor was a pleasant one, chiefly because he spent a good deal of his time at the Priory; and everybody who visited the Priory enjoyed himself. A house, in which one of its residents was Mrs. Prince, was sure to be an abode of satisfaction. She carried sunshine wherever she went; and Robert Evershed, whom, without much effort, she succeeded in pleasing, was not indisposed to bask in her sunshine. Five days of his visit had gone, four of which he had dined at the Priory, when, as he was wending his way thither one morning, he met Mrs. Calley, walking by herself, in the direction of Dr. Kealwin's house.

"Shall I find the Doctor at home?" she asked, as she stopped and spoke to the gentleman.

"I left him a few minutes since."

"Ah! well, I'll hurry on towards him. You are going to the Priory, I suppose?"

And then she looked meaningly at him, as if his going to the Priory were a matter of some moment. With a very few words they parted, Mrs. Calley going her way, and Robert his.

She was perfectly satisfied with matters as they had been happening the last few days at the Priory. It was true that Mr. Somerton had been there very often, and that he had been a good deal in the society of Mrs. Prince; but Mr. Evershed had been there just as often, and had had as great a share of Mrs. Prince's society as the rich owner of Ashley Hall.

As she walked along towards the Doctor's house, she congratulated herself upon this fact; but when this congratulation had wrought a soothing effect upon her, she happened to look up, and saw Arthur Somerton approaching on his very swift mare! He did not stop, but raised his hat and passed on. It was a rather galling reflection for her as she turned and saw his horse speeding towards the Priory, that he would arrive there sooner than Mr. Evershed, who was on foot. However, she did not anticipate any great danger that morning there, and trudged quickly on to the Doctor's.

Now Dr. Kealwin being a man of very regular habits, was wont to observe some of the customs of his earlier manhood. One of these

customs was to devote an hour or two out of each morning to the study of some English or foreign classic. Hence he did not allow his brains to rust, or his intimacy with all the best literature, (for he was master of half-a-dozen modern languages,) to become dull. Mrs. Calley was shown into his library, the walls of which were lined with books, and here she found him calmly reading Gibbon. The polished style of the "Decline and Fall" was especially palatable to the intellectual taste of the Doctor, who by no means relished this intrusion of the old lady, when he was enjoying one of his best chapters.

Mrs. Calley seated herself with little ceremony. "Reading, reading," she said; "you've stuffed a good deal into your head, Kealwin; I wonder whether much of it has been good."

The polite Doctor bowed, and put his book a little aside, casting, however, a wistful eye to the forsaken page.

"I like to keep up my acquaintance with the works which I perused when I was a boy. By so doing, I become, as it were, rejuvenescent;

the hopes, the aspirations, the kindly sympathies, which are only known by a boy of eighteen or nineteen, revisit me once more."

"Ah," said Mrs. Calley, abruptly; "that's all very fine. I don't suppose you wish everything you did when you were a boy or a young man to come back to your memory, would you? If so, you are not the man I take you to be."

With this complimentary speech Mrs. Calley drew nearer the table, looking across it towards the Doctor, as if she had something of importance to say to him. He smiled at this speech of hers, and said blandly—

"Well, well, perhaps not." Adding, "But to what am I indebted for the pleasure of a visit from you this morning?"

"I'll tell you directly. Doctor, I don't suppose you are better than anybody else; but I will so far compliment you as to say that I believe you like occasionally to do a kindness."

"I am glad I am not entirely reprobate in your opinion; but before you open your budget, let me have the pleasure of giving you a glass

of sherry. After your walk, it will refresh you."

"Not a drop, though I know your sherry is fine. You like good things yourself too well, Doctor, to offer your guests what you, in courtesy, must partake of, at the same time. Not a drop."

The Doctor had moved from his seat towards a chiffonier standing on the side of the room, but the peremptory tone of Mrs. Calley's refusal made him seat himself again.

"Robert Evershed is your nearest relative, isn't he?"

"Yes," responded Kealwin, "he is."

"Ah, some day you'll die, Doctor, and then, of course, he'll have your money."

The look upon Kealwin's face by no means assented to this. Perceiving it, Mrs. Calley said energetically—

"But he surely will."

"I have the satisfaction of knowing that I am likely to live twenty-five or thirty years longer," was the Doctor's response.

"If so," answered Mrs. Calley, bluntly,

"there's the more reason you should do something for him now. I've taken a fancy to him. Mrs. Prince, I think, likes him. He is of a good family on both sides; and without saying a rude thing, what good blood you have in your veins, comes from the source whence he derives some of his. He's poor; though if he's careful, has luck, and some assistance, he may, I think, in a few years' time, become a man of some consequence. I should like to see Olivia Prince marry him. She can't do it yet, the present condition of his affairs not allowing it. But if you are generous, and will give or lend a small portion of that which will come to him at your death, he and Olivia may make a match."

"Your disinterested generosity is very commendable, Mrs. Calley. I am only sorry that I am indisposed to become an assistant in it."

Mrs. Calley frowned.

"I thought better of you, Kealwin."

"My dear madam, I think you are very much mistaken in your impression that Mrs. Prince regards Robert Evershed sufficiently to

become his wife. And you are equally mistaken, I believe, in supposing that he is so attached to her as to wish to become her husband. I consider I have good reasons for knowing that Mrs. Prince's intentions with regard to Arthur Somerton are unmistakable ; and also consider that——”

“ Stuff! stuff!” interrupted Mrs. Calley ; “ the fact of it is, you won't part with your money !”

“ My failing in this respect is shared by a good many people ! And I confess I am unable to see, even supposing that matters stood as you erroneously imagine they do stand between Mr. Evershed and Mrs. Prince, that the nearness of my relationship to him would warrant my benefiting him at present in the manner you have described ; and I can tell you on very good authority, namely, on the authority of Mr. Evershed himself, that his affections are already disposed of.”

“ Do you mean that, Doctor ?” said Mrs. Calley, looking rather depressed.

“ I do indeed.”

"Hem!—Then the sooner he goes away the better. And who is this girl?"

"I think he said her name was Proby."

"Never heard of it. But he says that he will not marry,—that, indeed, he cannot."

"He even said something of the same to me. I do not assert that he is engaged; but from what he told me, I have no hesitation in saying that your hopes with regard to him and Mrs. Prince are vain. Again——"

"Well, well," interrupted Mrs. Calley, irritably, "even if they had not been, I don't suppose I should have much reason to thank you for assisting to satisfy them in any way."

Unheeding the old lady's irritable tone of voice, the Doctor went blandly on—

"Again, I can tell you, on equally good authority, that Mrs. Prince's hand and heart are already pledged."

"Dr. Keaiwin!" cried the old lady.

"You met Mr. Somerton—did you not?"

"I did," she answered coolly.

"He called here before he went on to the Priory, and told me of a step he had taken.

Finding that he had few opportunities of verbally declaring his passion to Mrs. Prince, he availed himself of the post, and communicated his desires by writing ! This morning he received a note from her acknowledging that in which he had made an offer of his hand, and answering that note in a tone most flattering to his hopes !”

The Doctor had got a victory ; and Mrs. Calley was dumbfounded.

“ So you see,” he said calmly, “ if I were disposed to be a more generous man than I confess I am, there are two obstacles at once to my generosity attaining its object !”

Mrs. Calley felt very much annoyed. She was angry that Olivia should have taken the course referred to by the doctor without saying a word to her, and she was angry that she should hear of her discomfiture from the lips of Kealwin.

“ I wish you'd take a glass of sherry !” said the Doctor, as she was rising.

“ I'm sorry I can't gratify you,” was her ungracious response ; and she left the study and walked back to the Priory with a very sour look

upon her face. As soon as she could she pounced on Mrs. Prince.

“And so you’ve done it!”

“Done what?”

“Accepted Arthur Somerton!”

“Indeed I have not!”

“Why!—Olivia, you have! You must have. Kealwin told me!” And then Mrs. Calley entered into the particulars of her visit to the Doctor. Her negotiations had come to nothing; and there was no reason that they should be concealed from the person to whom they related.

“You are very kind, Mrs. Calley,” said Olivia; “but if it’s any comfort for you to learn that I have *not* accepted Mr. Somerton, I give you that comfort!”

“You did not refuse him when he wrote!”

“No, I did not exactly refuse him. I left the matter open!”

“But he thinks you have accepted him, or as good as done so!”

“No—indeed he does not! We have had some chat this morning; and I am free to refuse him now!”

“You’ll get yourself into a mess, Olivia. I’m sorry Robert Evershed is not a richer man ! But Somerton—my dear, you are throwing yourself away !”

Mrs. Prince only smiled.

“You don’t love the light-haired noodle, with his nasty moustache !”

“Love him ? Perhaps he wouldn’t wish for a deeper affection than I can give him !”

Mrs. Calley looked sharply into the face of her friend. “You are not altogether what you seem, Olivia,” she said slowly, almost sadly. “Worldly—worldly—and—”

“And what ?” asked Mrs. Prince, carelessly.

“I don’t know ! I confess you are too deep for me !”

A few days more, and Mrs. Calley, Mrs. Hamperton, and Robert were gone. Mrs. Calley did not leave in a very satisfied mood. Olivia still encouraged the attentions of Mr. Somerton ; and the old lady did nothing but scowl and frown, as she evidently saw that Mrs. Prince was bent on throwing herself away. Robert’s visit

had not seemed to add much to his favour in the Doctor's eyes. Kealwin said nothing about his property; and Evershed knew that he must do his work—as he always expected he should—unaided and alone. Eloquent Mr. Hamperton had said many kind words to the Doctor for Robert's sake; but this gentleman's good offices were of no avail. "If you had only a little spare cash, Mr. Evershed, I'd soon make you a rich man," said the projector; and let Mr. Hamperton enjoy the credit of having spoken what he believed.

"I wish"—Lester Temple remarked to Georgine, as the two watched and saw Robert off—"that some good fortune would happen to him. He has a hard life before him!"

"How Mrs. Calley has interested herself in him," answered Georgine, who of late had become more gracious to Lester: that little incident of the drawing having propitiated her. "If he had only been wealthy, she would have tried to bring about a match between him and Olivia!"

"I don't think she would have succeeded!"

And then the two grew very confidential; and

Georgine, in her anxiety for Robert Evershed's welfare, showed, that, with all her vanity and wilfulness, she had a tender woman's heart.

"I hope, indeed, with you, Mr. Temple, that your friend will meet with some good luck. I think Doctor Kealwin, although he is only a very distant relation, ought to assist him!"

As for Evershed, he drove to Langbourne, his heart getting heavier with every mile. When he came in sight of the Hall, his hands tightened on the reins, and his face set hard—almost cruel.

"Whatever I have to deny myself, however long and bitter the struggle, I will be master there," he murmured.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BOUGHT."

ROBERT spent many weary, weary weeks after the sunshine of his visit to Messingham. The "eternal want of pence which vexes public men," was sorely plaguing him; and at times he was sorry that he ever attempted the work, whose hardness was lessened by never so small a degree, with all his anxious labour and resolute self-denial. Fortunately these desponding humours did not remain with him long; and the fit over, he resumed his task more gallantly than ever.

In the meantime, however, fortune was es-

pecially kind to Mr. Proby, though it showed its sternest face to Robert. The speculations with which he had to do, owing to the eloquence of Mr. Hamperton, and the urgency of his daughter, had all turned out "trumps." The per-centages were wonderful. Respectable four-and-a-half bowed its head before triumphant twenty-five, thirty, or thirty-five! Mr. Proby was doubling his fortune fast.

Of course, Mr. Evershed was ignorant of his friend's great good luck. Mr. Proby, who was neither vain nor boastful, did not go crowing about that he was becoming a rich man. It was generally known that certain speculations, of which the Langbourners had read accounts in the newspapers, had turned out wonderfully auspicious, and that many a man who had shares in them had quickly realized a fortune; but startling would have been the intelligence that timid, nervous Mr. Proby was one of the most successful of these golden harvest men!

Robert saw but little of Sibylla now; indeed, he seemed to avoid her. They met sometimes at church; where she noticed that he was getting

paler and thinner. Anxiety and work were telling upon him. She watched with anguished heart the tired look of the man she loved, and prayed some good chance would so order it, that he should have a share in the worldly blessings which were being rained upon her father.

Mr. Proby was duly thankful for the good things which had fallen to him ; but while he was rejoicing in a modest way at his success, something happened to chasten his self-congratulation. Sibylla got ill. She was restless, pale, and thin. Her black eyes lost their lustre ; and her maid, after arranging her toilette table one morning, said :—" Why lor, Miss, your hair is falling off—your beautiful hair—you can't be well, Miss ; what a pity !" The observation of this kind handmaiden was correct. The grand thick hair had lost some of its luxuriance ; and care and thought, and " restless, unsatisfied longing " were casting a shadow over Sibylla's beauty.

" Sibylla, dear, what's amiss," asked Mr. Proby, one morning : a morning which brought

him an unusually triumphant letter from Mr. James Hamperton, and which brought him face to face with his daughter at breakfast time, looking weaker than ever.

"Oh, papa—nothing—it is the hot weather. I shall be better soon!"

"Let me call in a doctor."

A doctor was called in; saw Miss Proby; guessed how matters stood; and when he was alone with her father said:—

"Proby—there's nothing the matter with your daughter. Nothing serious. There have been some love passages between her and Evershed, haven't there? At least it has been so rumoured in the place."

"I—I don't know. I think there may have been."

"Ah! of course. And the fellow says he can't marry—don't he?"

"I dare say you know the state of his affairs better than I do!"

"Take the hint I've given you. If he's been playing with your daughter, or is playing with her now, put a stop to it, at once. If he's a

man, and is not playing with her, give the affair your encouragement. Women are such queer cattle. If a man says a tender word and gives 'em a kiss, and don't follow them up, they get so ill, you'd fancy they had every disease that flesh is heir to. Good-bye. I'll send a little medicine. But do you see, Evershed, and don't let him play the fool!"

And with these sage remarks the doctor mounted his horse and rode away.

Mr. Proby stood cogitating.

On the evening of this day, Robert Evershed, Mrs. Evershed, and Jocelyn, the bailiff, paid a visit to Wyndon Grove. Mrs. Evershed was wheeled there by Jocelyn in her invalid's chair. It was not often that she left the house; and until this occasion she had been away from it for many months. But her health had flickered up into a brighter state lately—alas! the brightness was very dim—and she was enabled to go out for a little time, and to taste the freshness of the cool air. Her particular object in visiting the Grove now was to see the trees which

Robert had marked, some time ago, for destruction. The Grove would soon be despoiled of some of its beauty ; and if she ever visited it again, she would visit it only to find much of its glory gone.

When she arrived there, she looked sadly around her :—

"And so some of those trees must come down, Robert? Poor trees!"

"I will shew you those which I have determined upon selling. Let the chair remain where it is, Jocelyn. You cannot see all of them, mother, from the clearing, and when I have shewn you as many as I can, I want Jocelyn to come with me, to give me his opinion on the others."

Jocelyn and her son walked away ; Mrs. Evershed remaining in her chair. Robert went from tree to tree, stopping at those which were doomed to the axe. Mrs. Evershed watched him painfully ; sighing again and again as he pointed his ruthless finger against the doomed timber.

Perhaps some superstitious feeling might have suggested to her that it was vain to hope the

Eversheds would ever re-establish themselves, when it was so fated that one of their name must partially destroy what had been so great a delight to them.

Robert, having pointed out as many of the trees as she could see from the spot where her chair was standing, disappeared with Jocelyn amongst the thicker part of the Grove. She could hear their footsteps getting fainter and fainter; then came silence.

"Will my hope ever be realised?" she thought. "Will Robert ever be free and able to hold up his head as he ought? I sometimes think that I am dreaming of what can never be. I sometimes think that it would have been better had I left things to chance—to chance."

Her head sank upon her breast; and for the first time, for many weary months, the tears welled up to her eyes. She had thought of the hard fate of her son with bitter sorrow; but it had been a sorrow that vented itself in no tears. Their blessing had come now, and she could think of Robert's lot with a pitying gentleness, which she had not known hitherto.



"Mrs. Evershed."

At a voice so addressing her she looked up, and saw Mr. Proby.

"I am glad to see you out," said this gentleman rather nervously. "Is Mr. Robert quite well?"

"Yes," answered the lady, coldly.

"I was about to visit the Hall, when I saw your chair here."

"To visit the Hall?"

Mr. Proby bowed, and said:—"I wish to have a few words with you, Mrs. Evershed. Can I have them now?"

"Do they relate to any matter of importance?"

"Yes—of some importance."

"My son is in the Grove; and will, I have no doubt, soon return to me. Is it a matter which you would object to talk upon before him?"

"I should prefer to talk of it with you first, Mrs. Evershed."

She bowed.

"Will it occupy you long? If it does not, you can let me know what it is, perhaps, before my son returns."

Mr. Proby, nervous at most times, was particularly nervous now, and had some little difficulty in delivering himself of his mission.

“I think, Mrs. Evershed, you may have been aware that your son has been in the habit of passing a good deal of his time in the society of my daughter? I do not come here to blame him—no—not in the smallest degree.” Mrs. Evershed made a movement of impatience, which sadly disconcerted poor Mr. Proby. “No, not in the smallest degree,” he repeated, as if to deprecate her impatience. “I wish you to understand this, Mrs. Evershed. I have come upon a different mission. I believe your son loves my daughter——”

“Stay, Mr. Proby,” said the lady, holding up her hand. “My days of romance have long gone by; and if you know anything of me and of my son, you will have the respect to say nothing further upon the errand which has brought you here. I am ready to do justice to your fatherly interest in Miss Proby—a young lady whose qualities I fully appreciate—but I say it to you with all possible kindness, you have

no need to proceed further in your communication. I can guess what it is. My son has been unwise enough to cause your daughter to believe that he cares for her—that is, that he loves her—and has done nothing more than this. In your daughter's interest, you come to ask me what his real meaning may be?"

"You are much mistaken, Mrs. Evershed—you are very much mistaken. In the first place, let me assure you that your son has openly declared his love for my daughter—that he has given her reasons which prevent his marrying her—and that she has been willing enough to admit to him that those reasons are justifiable! Perhaps I am willing enough to admit that they are, too! I did not, however, come here to say this alone. My daughter's welfare is as dear to me as your son's; and if you will have the kindness to listen with a little patience to what I have to say, I think you will see that the fact of a marriage between your son and my daughter is not such a very indefensible thing. I should not be so bold as to venture upon so delicate a subject, if I did not know that your

son loved my daughter as deeply as she loves him !”

Mrs. Evershed looked with painful wonderment into Mr. Proby's face, and said, in something like a whisper,—

“What do you mean, sir ?”

Mr. Proby resumed :—

“Both you and your son, I think, have been under the impression that my daughter was unsuitable as a wife for him, on the strength of her having no dower worth bringing her husband. This impression, some time since, was a correct one ; but it is so no longer.”

“Mr. Proby, I can assure you,” remarked Mrs. Evershed, “that my son would never make a mercenary marriage. He is too honourable a man to be guilty of that discreditable act ; and his circumstances, as you may be aware, are such as to render the hope of any marriage impossible, as yet.”

“I know—I know,” said Mr. Proby ; “he gave my daughter to understand as much.”

“Does your daughter make you her confessor, Mr. Proby ?”

"No," returned that gentleman, with some little asperity. "It was with the greatest difficulty that I could cause her to say anything at all about the subject which has brought me to you. A few months since I was not a rich man. I can even scarcely call myself that now. But, owing to various reasons, my property has considerably augmented; and when my daughter marries, I shall be able to give her a sum which no man in your son's position would despise."

Mr. Proby stopped. In surprise at his announcement, Mrs. Evershed looked at him. Then she said, slowly—

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Such is the case, I assure you, Mrs. Evershed," Mr. Proby went on, in his hurried, nervous manner. "If you give your consent to a marriage between your son and my daughter, and if Mr. Robert still adheres to the words he said to her—words which indicated that his greatest wish was to marry her, were his circumstances such as would allow him—I will give my daughter, on the morning of her marriage, five thousand pounds; and in the course

of the following six months, five thousand pounds more!"

"I did not expect this," said Mrs. Evershed. "This is generous of you. But Robert—what will he say? He will almost fear that you will think his marriage was dictated by mercenary motives."

"Indeed! indeed! I shall not. Do not fear that, Mrs. Evershed. He spoke honestly and fairly to my daughter; and, therefore, should he accept my offer, I shall have no cause to attribute his acceptance to unworthy motives. Neither will Sibylla—be assured of that!"

"I am glad to hear you say so. If I entertained the least suspicion of your regarding my acceptance of your offer, and my son's acceptance—should he give it—as springing from any other than a justifiable motive, I would not listen to you another word. As you tell me that he has openly declared his regard for your daughter, and given her reasons why he is unable to make her what he would desire to make her—his wife, I have good cause for believing that my son's attachment to your daughter is

sincere. And as she—stay—does she know of your coming to me on this particular mission?"

"No, Mrs. Evershed."

"I am not the important person in this matter. It will rest with my son to give a definite answer to your proposals. I must tell you this, Mr. Proby—it must be as perfectly clear to him, as it is to me, that his conduct, in the event of his acceptance of your terms, is regarded in no sinister light before he gives in his adhesion to your suggestion. I know him too well. He is most painfully placed, and will do nothing which will compromise, or seem to compromise, his honour."

And Mrs. Evershed fully believed the truth of what she was saying. The desire of achieving a noble work had made her selfish—as this desire morbidly developed would make the best of us selfish, and as it had made her son Robert—though both he and his mother were blind to the fact.

As for Mr. Proby, he too had no difficulty in persuading himself that the acceptance of his offer on the part of Mrs. Evershed and her son

would bespeak no selfishness. He had only the interest and the happiness of his daughter at heart ; and so long as this interest and this happiness were secured, he was willing to see nothing but good qualities in those that helped to realize his wishes.

"Now that you have spoken to me, Mr. Proby," said Mrs. Evershed, "it is right that you should speak to my son. I hear him returning. Perhaps you will accompany us back to the house."

Robert that moment appeared with Jocelyn, and was surprised to see Mr. Proby standing with his mother.

"Mr. Proby is going to the house with us, Robert," she said. "He has something to tell you which may give you pleasure."

They all returned to the Hall, Jocelyn pushing Mrs. Evershed's invalids' chair. When Robert learned Mr. Proby's mission, he turned to his mother and said—

"What am I to do?"

"You are your own master in this, as in all things."

Robert thought several minutes, and then gave Mr. Proby the answer he desired.

The next day Sibylla was brought by Robert to the Hall; and Mrs. Evershed, sitting in her dreary room, placed the girl's hand in her son's, with these words—

"I hope you will be happy." She said no more. She was thinking that the shadow which had so long darkened the fortunes of the Eversheds, seemed to be passing a little away.

So, thanks to Mr. Hamperton, whose magic wand had filled empty coffers with gold, Love need despair no longer!

END OF BOOK THE FIRST.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE BURSTING OF A BUBBLE.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN MR. HAMPERTON CRIES "PECCAVI."

WHEN Mr. Proby had good reason to believe that his daughter would become Mrs. Robert Evershed, he wrote Mr. James Hamperton a letter, signifying that he should require, in the course of a little while, as a dower for his daughter, some five thousand pounds of that money which the clever speculator was now manipulating so successfully. He wrote his letter in perfect good faith that his friend would respond to it at once, by saying that the five thousand should be placed in his hands at any time he named. The world had not taught Mr.

Proby much experience, and he was not aware that when money is once introduced into a great commercial enterprise (to quote Mr. Hamperton's own words) it is not so easy to get it out, save at some considerable sacrifice. I am sorry to say that at the present moment he did not know the whereabouts of his money so accurately as Mr. Hamperton. This clever man's advice had been taken in all matters relative to its disposal. If he suggested that Mr. Proby should sell out, and buy in another company, Mr. Proby immediately did as he was bidden. He had perfect faith in the counsels of his friend, and saw no reason why he should not abide by it in all things, more especially as he had good cause for knowing that as yet his monetary transactions had flourished triumphantly under his guidance. Mr. Proby had shares in hotels, banking associations, credit fonciers, credit mobiliers, railways, mines, canals, patent inventions, and marvellous other concerns, which, in the prospectus of their promoters, were to effect wonders. Whenever he read the advertisements in a daily newspaper, he had the satisfaction of knowing that some of those

numerous companies, whose operations were to result in such universal good, (to say nothing of the glorious per-centage which was promised the shareholders,) were in many cases very considerably supported by himself. The man with the least amount of vanity in his disposition, must feel a thrill of satisfaction in knowing that he is helping towards the success of such vast enterprises; and the man whose affection for gold is anything but a ruling passion, cannot be indifferent when he reflects that the working of those great companies is materially increasing his own worldly goods. •

Mr. Hamperton did not trouble Mr. Proby with unnecessary details of the enterprises in whose benefits he wished him to have a share. "My dear Proby. Another grand thing has turned up—a hotel—a bank—a railway—a something for somewhere—which will realize a fine per-centage. Give me the power to sell out in the last little concern, and buy in what I've named. You'll never repent it." Such were the gentleman's general terms; and in reply to these terms, Mr. Proby would remark,

that after having consulted his daughter, he was willing to give Mr. Hamperton the necessary power.

In answer to Mr. Proby's letter relative to the five thousand which would be needed as a dower for Sibylla, there came a characteristic reply from Mr. Hamperton, which Miss Proby's father was fain to take as satisfactory.

"My dear Proby"—ran the eloquent epistle—"I was delighted with your last letter. If there is one thing which touches my heart more pleasantly than another, it is to know that the course of young and true love is running smoothly. I am indeed glad to hear of the approaching nuptials of your accomplished daughter and Mr. Robert Evershed. Need I say I am not surprised that such an event is about to take place? As a father, you must contemplate it with peculiar, perhaps indescribable feelings. And though Providence has denied me children, I can fully appreciate the sentiments which must now flood your heart. Truly you ought to be a happy man, particularly as your daughter, though removed from your paternal care, will still reside

in your neighbourhood, and be within range of your affectionate eye ! I can assure you that when I first had the pleasure of meeting Miss Proby and Mr. Evershed, and watched their conduct towards each other, I was convinced there was something between them of a peculiarly interesting nature. As a man of sentiment, I regarded them with especial interest, and did not fail to recal certain incidents, which happened years ago, when I was waking up to the glory of love, and long before my bright bald head had ceased to become an attraction for any woman but my estimable wife. Pray tender to your daughter my respectful compliments, and my sincerest wishes that life may be a long bright day of happiness. Assure Mr. Evershed also that no one regards his welfare with greater solicitude than myself.

“ By the way, you said something about wanting five thousand pounds. I suppose you won't require it for three or four months. It would be most unwise of you to sell out in anything now ; for I expect a splendid rise in nearly all the things with which you are concerned. In

the meantime, I will bear that five thousand in my memory, and give you due notice of the time when you had better realize to that amount.

"I need not tell you that you are doing swimmingly in everything. Your luck is astonishing ! The most successful man expects a few failures now and then, but you have met with none. Have you any desire to become a director of the Anglo-Indian Credit Association ? Its operations will be immense, as you may judge from its name. Now, if you've a mind to see your name in print in connection with an enterprise, which will reflect glory upon our home and Indian empire, here's a chance.

"But my paper is exhausted, and business again claims my attention. Once more I congratulate you upon the interesting event which will soon transpire in your family. Believe me, my dear Proby, yours most faithfully, James Hamperton."

I do not know whether Mr. Proby was entirely satisfied with his friend's careless allusion to the five thousand pounds. At any rate, he did not make any fresh demand for it for some time,

convinced, I suppose, that Mr. Hamperton's judgment was not to be gainsaid. When he made a point of writing again upon this particular matter, it was because he was urged to it by his daughter. Sibylla had then been engaged to Robert Evershed some five or six weeks ; and it was in the interest of the man, whose wife she was to become, that she asked her father to send Mr. Hamperton another letter upon the subject of the money which was to constitute her dower. Since her engagement Robert had told her more of the nature of his affairs ; and if she was resolved upon anything with particular determination, it was that she would not become his wife without bringing serviceable aid to the work he had set before himself for accomplishment.

When the letter, which Mr. Proby, owing to his daughter's urgency, despatched to Mr. Hamperton, reached that gentleman, it found him over his matutinal eggs and ham : Mrs. Hamperton presiding at the head of the table, and taking due care that all her husband's wants were anticipated.

Mr. Hamperton read the letter quickly, put

it in his pocket, dabbed his fork into a nice succulent piece of steaming hot bacon, and said—"Ah!—Such is life!"

"Anything amiss, my love?" demanded Mrs. Hamperton, with wifely solicitude.

"Oh, dear me no!—nothing. Another cup of coffee, if you please, as I must soon be off! This will be a long day with me. Proby's daughter is going to marry, and he wishes me to sell out to the tune of five thousand pounds. What a pity it is that the purity and sublimity of love should be marred by the sordidness and materiality of money! Well, I must see what can be done!"—It is to be presumed that Mr. Hamperton had forgotten his former eloquent antiphon on money as the great friend of true and happy love.

Mr. Hamperton soon despatched his breakfast. As he was getting up, his wife said:—"And is Miss Proby really going to marry Mr. Robert Evershed?"

"So it seems."

"I hope they'll be happy!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamperton with womanly feeling.

“ You may depend upon it that the husband will be,” responded Mr. Hamperton, with his peculiar gallantry, “ if his wife is only half as estimable as yourself, my darling ! Farewell ! I must be off. Business calls me ; for the rest of the day I shall be deprived of your charming society—unenviable lot for me ! Dinner at six. I should like a duck, some veal cutlets, and a sweet omelette : nothing more. Good bye.”

Then he touched his wife upon the lips, by way of giving her a chaste salute, and took his departure.

Mr. Hamperton entered his profession as his own master when he was quite a young man. Though it was extensive, it scarcely gave scope enough for the play of his particular genius. Even the multitudinous branches which lead off from the main road of a solicitor’s profession were insufficient to satisfy the aspirations and the talents of James Hamperton. As well as he could, however, he extended it, and multiplied its branches. To remain a solicitor, and a solicitor alone, would soon have fretted him to death ; and heaven only knows what pie he

had not a finger in. Had he possessed caution he would have been an excellent man of business. He was shrewd and daring. Success was clear to him where it was dubious to others. Where others held back he dashed forward—sometimes reaping the reward of his daring; at other times, as may be supposed, having good occasion to rue it. Entrusted with money by his clients, he became a speculator. In speculation his powers found congenial play. Good luck befriended him for many years and his ventures rarely miscarried. Of that mysterious money world, about which even some of the richest men are ignorant, he had an extensive knowledge. Dull parchments, with their miserable tautology, had fewer charms than share lists, and the prospectuses of new speculations; and frequently as six and eightpences came in, their aggregate was less satisfactory than that made by a good coup in a speculation scheme. Rumour of his success got abroad; and it was only reasonable that it should be attributed to the possession of superior abilities. And Hamperton became a power and an

authority in the speculative world. By the time he had been ten years in business its complexion had wonderfully altered. A good many of his old clients, clients whose connexion with him was a purely legal one, had left him ; and their places had been supplied by those whom he esteemed a great deal more.

Many were the companies which he was chiefly instrumental in getting up—perfectly legitimate concerns these ; and their working all fair and above board. By degrees others were started, whose legitimacy was more questionable, and which certainly did not court too much light of day. *Facilis descensus averni* ; and a man who is characteristically uncautious may soon become unscrupulous. Strict scrupulosity had never been one of James Hamperton's virtues ; and the speculating world in which he lived was not calculated to bring such a virtue into existence. If any kind friend, in the earlier days of his professional life, had said that he would one day be very much like a knave, the gentleman to whom this prophecy referred would have denied such a possibility with honest

indignation. A sharp headed man can defend the most slippery career ; and if Mr. Hamperton ever thought it necessary to vindicate his course, he would have vindicated it in this way :—Certain speculations, whose early character had every guarantee for the honesty of their aims, and the honesty of means by which they were to be conducted, had ended disastrously — disastrously to those who had entrusted their fortunes to them, and disastrously to the credit of their managers ; while other speculations, whose object was very equivocal, had by some caprice of fortune become marvellously successful, and acquired a stability which invited general public confidence. With these facts staring him in the face, Mr. Hamperton became hazy in his views as to what was, or was not, justifiable in the schemes set afloat in the money world ; and he acted accordingly. A more naturally upright man might find his views confused by seeing reality emerge from what seemed a myth—by finding falsehood where he expected truth—certainty where he had feared uncertainty—and results constantly falsifying anti-

ceptions. Living in uncertain lights, it was no wonder that Mr. Hamperton lost his sense of colour—or that colour appeared one uniform hue, nowhere distinguishable.

A good deal of his business at the present time was business which no honest man need feel any shame of carrying on : a good deal was such that no cautious or scrupulous man would have anything to do with ; and the rest—the greatest—no upright man would have countenanced for a moment. As to any property, personal or real, in his possession, I don't think he had any cause to congratulate himself upon the result of his unquestionable abilities, and, to give it no harder word, his unquestionable unscrupulousness. A good deal of money was in the habit of passing through his hands, but it never lingered there long.

Mr. Hamperton was by no means pleased at Mr. Proby's request for the five thousand pounds ; but he was wise enough to know that he could not shirk the duty imposed upon him. He remembered Sibylla Proby, and knew that she was not a woman whose desires were to be

thwarted. While Mr. Hamperton was at his business, his wife received a visit from her excellent mother. This lady was in the habit of darting in upon her daughter when she least expected or desired to see her, and her visits never left her daughter so happy as they found her. If anything went wrong with Mrs. Calley, and her servants failed to be sufficiently attractive as objects of her indignation, she carried herself to Jane's, and gave Jane the benefit of her spleen. Nothing seemed to ease her mind so successfully as abusing Mr. James Hamperton in the presence of Mr. James Hamperton's wife ; and she was not long with her to-day before she commenced making remarks uncomplimentary to the solicitor and speculator.

She dropped into an easy chair, and commenced fire thus :—

" So, your husband is out, Jane?"

" Of course he is, mamma ; you know his business duties require him."

" Fudge ! I know no such thing ; I believe he's a humbug."

“Mamma!”

“I repeat, I believe he is one; nay, more, —I believe he is the greatest in London.”

“How unkind of you to say this!” exclaimed Mrs. Hamperton; “you know he is the best of husbands to me: so kind, so attentive, so——”

“Stuff and nonsense! He gammons you, Jane. You are no match for him. He’s a deceiver.”

“I’ll not believe it.”

“It is so much the better for you that you do not. Mark my words — one day you’ll find him out, and say I was right. I’m not often wrong in judging a person. Ever since I first knew James Hamperton, I did not believe in him, and I have never had occasion to alter my first impression.”

That these remarks, so unflattering to her husband, should be very painful to Jane Hamperton was to be expected; for she liked him, and she believed in him, though he was much in the habit of showing leniency to the short-comings of good-looking maid-ser-

vants, and perhaps of regarding their features with an attention, which on the part of a person with artistic tastes might have been pardonable ; and she now began to cry. She had little to say in defendinn herself against her mother's very unpleasant tongue.

"Whenever you come here you make me unhappy, mamma. If you can't do anything else but abuse my hushand, I wish you'd stay away."

"Oh, you silly child ! you silly child ! Believe in him as much as you like. You were always a baby, Jane, and you'll be so till your dying day."

And with this complimentary speech Mrs. Calley relapsed into silence. Mrs. Hamperton, after recovering from her lachrymose effusion, plucked up courage, and said to her mother—

"Have you heard anything from the Bryants ?"

"Yes," responded Mrs. Calley, snappishly, "I have ; I heard this morning."

Mrs. Hamperton's reasoning powers, incapable of summing up her husband, were equal

to the task of discovering that her mother had heard something unpleasant from the Bryants, and that she had come to her to rid herself of the spleen engendered by the communication from Messingham Priory.

"How is Mrs. Prince?" asked Mrs. Hamperton with some timidity. Feeling very uncomfortable on account of the remarks of her mother, she had still curiosity enough to prompt her to know the state of a lady's love affairs.

"She is a fool," responded Mrs. Calley, curtly.

"Is—is she engaged to Mr. Somerton?"

"Engaged, Jane! how should I know? She's deep, deep as the sea. I wonder who knows the bottom of that woman's heart. She writes me word that Mr. Somerton called yesterday; dined the day before that; played croquet with them the day before that, and is going to a pic-nic with them on the day after to-morrow. What does all this dining, and calling, and pic-nicing, and playing that insane game of croquet mean? When I wrote to her a week ago, I

asked her whether or not she was engaged to Mr. Somerton. She gives me no direct answer, but merely says that he's doing this and doing that, and that she is making herself a fool with him at the same time. Well, well, he is rich, and she can manage him ; and perhaps the affair will not be such a bad one, after all, though I wish she had selected a man who was less of an ass—albeit, he is not what your husband is—a humbug."

It eased Mrs. Calley immensely to conclude the statement of what was her great grievance, by this complimentary remark. Jane Hamper-ton said nothing, but turned her eyes dolefully on the floor.

"Don't be silly, Jane ; I don't want to hurt you," said her mother, "only I'm put out, and such is human nature, that I like to show somebody that I'm not at all satisfied with the performances of Olivia Prince. Now, there was Mr. Robert Evershed ; if he had been well off, I sincerely believe that she would have got him for a husband, and he's worth a thousand Arthur Somertons."

"But he's about to be married. My husband is engaged in some business for the father of the young lady who is to be his wife, and he told me so this morning!"

"Indeed. I dare say. Well . . . -Nothing that I ever wished to happen did happen. I thought Robert Evershed was, in most respects, a suitable husband for Olivia Prince; and if old Kealwin had been at all human, he would have been so in the important respect of money. Well—well—well—there's no use complaining. In this world there is always something to go wrong. At least I have found it so. And whether Olivia Prince marries Arthur Somerton, or whether she does not, it is a matter of little concern to me! Only you know now why I was in a bad temper with you!"

As Mrs. Calley had chiefly visited her daughter for the purpose of giving vent to her unamiable humour, and as she had explained the causes which produced this unamiable humour, she had little further to do. Still she did not like to leave immediately after accomplishing only so little, so she resolved upon getting as much

gratification as she could from pumping her daughter.

"I suppose your husband is out a good deal," she said.

"Of course, mamma! His business takes him out early in the morning—"

"And brings him home late at night, I suppose. The case always. Ah! I often see his name in the newspapers!"

"Do you?"

"Yes. He's solicitor for this and that company. I was looking through the papers this morning, and saw his name connected with half a dozen different companies. He ought to be doing well, Jane—uncommonly well. I suppose he doesn't let you much into the secrets of his business—eh?"

"He knows, mamma, that I don't understand business, and therefore he doesn't trouble me with its details!"

"I dare say not," was Mrs. Calley's sarcastic answer. "Ah! those men! those men! There's no believing in them. They are corrupt from top to toe. If there is one thing in the world

that I distrust more than another, it is a Man ! They are rogues all. When they are not deceiving their wives, they are deceiving other women !”

To this Mrs. Hamperton made no response.

“ Well,” observed Mrs. Calley, “ what time do you expect your husband home to-day ?”

“ At six o’clock.”

“ Oh. And what do you intend to give him for dinner ?”

Mrs. Hamperton hesitated. Then she gave the bill of fare—

“ Ducks, some veal cutlets, and a sweet omelette !”

“ He evidently knows what is good. If I could stay with comfort I would, though to be sure I dare say you wouldn’t wish me !”

This latter statement was perfectly truthful : Mrs. Hamperton had no desire that her inquisitive mother should grace the family table with her presence ; amusing as the old lady might prove.

Feeling that she had got rid of some of her uncomfortable humour, Mrs. Calley bade her

daughter farewell, leaving this lady to see that the necessary preparations were made for her husband's dinner.

As Mrs. Hamperton was an unexceptionably good wife, delighting in her husband's presence, and overlooking this gentleman's frequent shortcomings, it was the most natural thing in the world that she should interest herself in the matter of his dinner. Mindful therefore of his ducks, his veal cutlets, and his sweet omelette, she carried herself into the kitchen as soon as she thought necessary. She gave her cook the requisite orders. She assured herself that the appetising articles would appear at the right moment and in the proper condition ; and then she once more repaired to her sitting-room.

As she was going thither, she heard the front door open, and in another moment she saw her husband enter.

He had gone out from her presence that morning looking as well and as happy as usual ; but he returned with so pale, so haggard a face as she had never seen before.

"James—James," she said, as the two went

into the dining-room together; "what is amiss—what is amiss? You do look bad."

"I am well enough," responded Mr. Hamperton, in a rather hoarse voice. "I am well enough. Get me some brandy. I am going into the country."

"Going into the country! Why? Oh, James, something has happened. I am sure it has!"

Harassed by a thousand painful thoughts, she got her husband the brandy bottle. He poured out half a glass, to which he added the smallest quantity of water, and drank it off. His paleness vanished a little after the stimulant, and he was something more like the James Hamperton of old than when his wife saw him return to the house at such an unusual hour.

"I must go into the country," he repeated—"to Langbourne. Pack up a carpet-bag as soon as possible. I want to catch a train which leaves Shoreditch in an hour. I shall not be able to return to-night!"

"What business is it that takes you away so suddenly?" enquired his wife.

"A most painful business indeed."

"Tell me! Tell me what it is!"

"Pardon me. That I cannot. Only some speculations have turned out badly. Poor Proby! Quick with my carpet-bag. I must be off!"

While his wife was getting his things ready, he poured out another glass of brandy and tossed it off, with a shaking hand. His wife had never seen him so moved; and when he shortly afterwards left, and sprang into the cab which had brought him home, she felt her heart sink.

Two or three circumstances of late had made her rather uneasy about James Hamperton, and the tone in which Mrs. Calley talked of him and his business, increased her uneasiness. She knew little of the world, or of business; but she had got to think that her husband's was not what it once was. The tone of pity with which Mr. Hamperton had spoken of Mr. Proby, convinced her that some evil had befallen him, and she thought pityingly of the daughter, who would, in all likelihood, be involved in her father's trouble.

At six o'clock, the duck and the veal cutlets appeared, followed by the sweet omelette. Mrs.

Hamperton sat down to dinner with little appetite, and soon rang for the servants to take the dinner away.

This done, Mrs. Hamperton sat down to work at some crochet, but she had hardly taken three stitches before she heard the front door bell ringing. Shortly afterwards a servant entered, and said—

“Please, ma’am, there’s a person at the door who wishes to see master.”

“Did you tell him that your master was out?”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“And is he still waiting?”

“Yes, ma’am—he’s still waiting.”

“Perhaps I had better go and see him.” And Mrs. Hamperton rose and went to the front door.

A man was standing there whom she never remembered to have seen before: and the last person of whom this history treats who had seen him, was Blanche Legh, as he was walking away from her weeks ago, bound for London. He was sickly-looking then, and he was even more sickly-looking now.

"Mr. Hamperton?" he said in a faint voice ;
"when can I see him?"

"Perhaps to-morrow. But I am not certain,"
responded Mr. Hamperton's wife, looking pity-
ingly at the man.

"If I call to-morrow at this time, shall I find
him at home?" the stranger asked, still faintly,
but with some eagerness.

"If you wish particularly to see him, you can
call at this time ; but I cannot say whether he
will be at home. He has just left town. Can
you leave any message with me for him?"

"No. I—never mind. I will call again, if
I am well enough, to-morrow."

That this stranger wanted money was Mrs.
Hamperton's impression—and her hand went
to her purse. To produce a half-crown, and
give it to him, was the work of a moment.

"Thank you ! thank you !" he replied, touched
by the kindness which beamed from Mrs. Ham-
perton's face, as well as by the act of kindness
itself.

Then with slow and uncertain steps he walked
away ; and she returned to her room.

All the time she had been looking at the man she had been conscious of some impression, whose nature she could not well analyse. This impression remained with her, as she resumed her crochet. It was vague at first, but soon became defined ; and she was not the only one to whom the impression had occurred.

It was that the appearance of the man at the door, and the appearance of her husband, were much alike.

The sorrowful thoughts with which she saw her husband depart, were deepened by this impression, into a presentiment of coming evil.

END OF VOL. I.



